

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

Some of you may be asking why have we got a kea on the cover?

Well firstly it's a truly magnificent photo of one of our iconic mountain birds, taken by our very own Luke. And secondly is showing what we all know but a lot of the population don't - and that is hunters are some of NZ's greatest conservationists, and we enjoy seeing the results of our mahi! We really care about the environment and our iconic native species. We're out there, off-track, in the hills seeing the real deal first hand - not like some, who almost never actually set foot in the wilderness. Instead, they're sitting in their ivory tower, houses in town listening to some of the ideological propaganda bandied about by the eco-fundamentalist organisations, and donating to them, thinking that they are making a difference. They are naive to the fact that a significant amount gets swallowed up keeping those organisations lobbying and propaganda wheels turning, and we see little of it making its way down to boots on the ground conservation gains - particularly when compared percentage wise to what is achieved by our lean and efficient hunting foundations. Some of these conservation organisations do have some good local initiatives - in fact many hunters are members as we all really care about the forests and birds that we spend our lifetimes in and around.

Those in the hills partaking in the real conservation like the many volunteer community groups running predator trapping, management programs for deer, tahr or goats and other biodiversity operations are the ones really giving good value for money - often at no or little cost to the tax payer. Yes, DOC does great work too, given the restrictions being a government department places on them. Their budgets are spread far too thinly though, and nothing any government department does comes cheap!

Look at what the likes of the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation has been doing for years, and more recently the Sika Foundation. These guys kill more predators and control more deer per dollar (and at little or no cost to the taxpayer) than any other government or volunteer organisation.

And the quid pro quo is simply reaching a balance of what's good and achievable anywhere there are significant biodiversity values while leaving a low (high quality not quantity) population of our valued game animals for current and future generations. This is simply recognising ecological

reality - the out of date ideological legislation and those who advocate for it have not eradicated a single introduced species from New Zealand - not one! All it/they have done is put hurdles in the way of achieving real wide scale managed control of these valued species for their harmful effects and their resource value (recreational, physical, mental and economic) and that is the real win/win for New Zealanders now and in the future.

You're all aware of Forest and Birds pending judicial review of DOC and the FWF over their management of Wapiti Area in Fiordland National Park. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that F&B see this as a landmark case to protect exactly the sort of out of date legislation I have been talking about. If you read some of their communications it is blatantly clear they see the FWF achieving legislative control of the management of the Wapiti Area as setting a precedent undermining their unrealistic ideology. Look at what happened when the Minister of Hunting and Fishing attended an event organised by the very sector he is supposed to represent, and in his own constituency? F&B's CEO came out publicly haranguing him for doing exactly what they would expect him to do if the boot was on the other foot!

This fight is only just beginning and it will take a lot of funds and lobbying to get a sensible outcome here. The FWF has already raised \$65,000 in donations alone for this campaign, but a lot more is going to be needed, so keep them coming! And keep leading by example showing the rest of New Zealand that hunters are some of our greatest conservationists!

It's been a fairly benign winter so far in the mountains, and we've still been able to get out and about and get a fair bit of filming done. Our young Chessie dogs have finally got to see what one of their main job descriptions in life is - and that's being hardy waterfowl dogs capable of taking multiple rough days on the big water in a row in their stride. And despite missing out on all of last season due to Cyclone Gabrielle, they're actually going pretty good! Now we've got the whole off-season to work on swimming long straight lines (300 to 400m) to birds they haven't seen fall - and can't see in the big waves on a windy day. This is the toughest challenge for any gun dog in my opinion, and one not many are capable of. **So now is the time to plan and initiate your training regime for the next nine months, so you don't end up in May wondering where the time went!**

Greg

There are 11 big game animal species in New Zealand. Which animal left this sign?



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Q&A

HI GREG

I hope you don't mind but I'm after some information about the 300 Winchester Magnum and I see on your show you use them quite a bit.

My mate has 2 x 300 Win Mags a Tikka T3 and a Sako Carbon light, up to now he has been using factory Sako ammo, but I've talked him into reloading for them. I've been reloading for about 40 years so have a pretty good handle on things but I've never loaded for a 300 or a belted magnum.

These are his South Island rifles and soon the Carbon Light might move to my safe. So are you able to tell me best projectiles that you have found and also powder, mainly for open country shooting? Both are factory length barrels but I'm talking him into fitting a DPT braked can on them and maybe cutting them to 22".

CHEERS, NEIL

HI NEIL

Our favourite projectile in the Tikka and Sako 300s is the Hornady 22gn ELD-M – so long as your rifle has a fast enough twist to stabilise them. Are they the more recent 1 in 10" twist Sakos and Tikka 300 Win Mags or the older 1 in 11" twist? The 11" often will work, but the 10" is definitely better – especially at long range. They are absolute hammers with this bullet in this twist as you will have seen in the Show.

The powder we have found works best is Vihtavouri N570. Second best would be Reloder 26. N570 should give you 2975fps with the 225gn out of a 24" barrel, and seems to shoot best at a just touch seating depth. These won't fit in your magazine in the Tikka, so we have a magazine-fit load with the 212gn

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ELD-X for close shots when you don't have time to single feed the long range 225gn load. The 225gn load will fit in the Sako magazine though, so you'll only need the one load. If you are hunting real big animals up close though, I would use the Barnes 150gn TTSX driven at about 3100fps. These will penetrate no matter the angle, even through the big shoulder knuckle on a quartering towards you shot despite the fact the impact velocity will be very high – where the more lightly constructed ELD-Xs and ELD-Ms are very likely to over expand and fail to penetrate.

Belted magnums are fine to load for so long as you don't over size them length wise and create headspace issues, which will lead to premature head separation. You want the case to headspace on the shoulder, not the belt, which is how the belted magnums were designed, hence the pointless belt. Ideally use a case fired several times in your rifle, back your die off and wind it down a little at a time until you can just close the bolt on a sized case, then wind it down a little more until you have no feel closing your bolt. Initially the case will be getting sized width-wise which pushes the shoulder forward a little so you won't be able to close the bolt. As you wind the die down, you'll progressively size more of the diameter but also eventually bump the shoulder back until the bolt will close. Depending on your chamber and dies, this may be with the die wound right down until it's hard on the shellholder, or you may be some way above it. Basically just treat the belted case the same as any other case and don't over-size it head to shoulder wise. Again this way of setting your die up is only with brass fired in the rifle. If it's been fired in another rifle, which may have greater tolerance in chamber diameter and the brass is already way too fat, you may already have pushed the shoulder back too far before you get the case to go in easily, if at all.

If you want these rifles for S.I. big country and longer range shots I would not shorten them. Just carry them with the can in your pack/daypack so they are not too cumbersome, and screw it on when you need it. If you're only going to use them out to 400 yards, then by all means knock a couple of inches off the barrel. You'll still get ample performance from the 300 Win Mag for that – it's actually a reasonably efficient cartridge!

CHEERS, GREG

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WRITTEN BY | JAMIE FAIRBAIRN

SIKA ADVENTURE WITH THE FAMILY

AFTER A BUSY CHRISTMAS PERIOD FOLLOWED BY A TRIP INTO THE BUSH AND A FEW LAKE DAY TRIPS, WE CONTEMPLATED WHAT WE SHOULD DO FOR WAITANGI WEEKEND. WE LOOKED FOR A BACH TO HIRE AT LAKE ROTOITI, BUT MOST WERE BOOKED OUT, AND THE ONES THAT WERE AVAILABLE WERE CRAZY EXPENSIVE FOR THE LONG WEEKEND. SO WE HATCHED A PLAN TO TAKE THE KIDS BACK INTO A PART OF THE COUNTRY WHERE I CUT MY TEETH LEARNING HOW TO HUNT SIKI DEER. IT WAS NOT JAMES OR FLETCHER'S FIRST TRIP INTO THE BUSH AFTER SIKI; BOTH OF THE LADS HAVE BEEN ON MANY ADVENTURES, AND WE ALWAYS TRY TO HAVE A MINIMUM OF ONE WEEK IN THE SCRUB TOGETHER IN EARLY APRIL



A whio in the creek

Over the last five years taking our kids hunting, we have found that the benefits out-weigh any of the hard work it takes to get them there.

Once you have arrived at your destination, camp is all set up and the whole family is present with no distractions; it's just perfect!

Amie and I had a few "goals" for the trip, as we always do, so we asked the lads what they wanted to tick off over the four nights we were away. **Between them, they worked out that a swim in the creek was a high priority, followed by seeing a few Sika deer. Finding bugs was also in the mix.** Friday came around fast as we pulled up to Helisika. The wind was noticeably strong, and I predicted we were in for a rough flight into camp. Amie is not the biggest fan of flying in any form, so she was a bit quiet.

With the gear weighed we loaded up the MD500 and set out for our camp for the next four nights. As soon as we crested the ridge out of Poronui Station, we could feel the turbulence. The lads were fine up the front but Amie in the back beside me had her eyes closed and was preparing herself for the next seven minutes. After we landed the lads and I carried the gear to camp while Amie took some time to clear her head and get her bearings again, as she was not well. **The flight in was one of the roughest I've had in over 100 helicopter flights!**

We set up camp just in time for the drizzle to come down. It was consistent for the rest of the day, so the lads and I

played cards while Amie slept off the flight sickness that had got considerably worse after landing.

The next day dawned with light drizzle again, so we had a leisurely breakfast and decided to wait for it to clear up, as I was carrying my new Canon camera and there was no way I was going to drown it on the first trip! **We were deep in the bush so there was no rush to head anywhere at first light.** Sika will be anywhere in the bush in summer, and with an abundance of feed and warm conditions, you can bump one at any time of the day, as I knew after many years of hunting the cool little creatures. Fletcher and I got restless mid-morning so we set off up the creek opposite camp to stretch our legs. We crossed the main river and sidled up the true left of what we call Water Creek for a bit until Fletch needed a toilet stop. Now, a toilet stop is nothing out of the ordinary, but this was one to remember. Fletcher returned after doing his business and I was putting my day bag on when



A young tomtit



A day out with the whole family

I noticed something hanging out of his pocket. I asked, *"Mate, what do you have in your pocket?"* He pointed to where he had just come from and said, *"the paper, Daddy."* I said *"wait, what? The toilet paper is on your pocket?"* He said, *"Yes, I didn't want to litter the bush, so I put it in my*



On of the clearings we looked down into



A close up of one of the swarms of dragonflies we came across



Fletcher with a dragonfly on his hat

pocket after I used it". Haha, well, that's a first for me but very thoughtful, wasn't he!! After that little discussion I had to dry my eyes to see through the tears, then we carried on up the ridge for a while. It was littered with sign, but this morning was not a lucky one for us, and we headed back to camp to get out of our wet clothes and have a late lunch.

The weather finally turned a corner and started clearing up in the afternoon, so we went for a walk in the last few hours before dark to a couple of close lookouts to see if there were any animals out. **Not long after we arrived, I spotted a hind just off a clearing at the back end.** As she came out of the big beech trees, she was followed by her fawn, and they slowly fed their way down the steep slope toward the clearing. I snapped a few photos while the boys watched through the binoculars. As we watched, they slowly fed towards the clearing without much concern for danger, only putting their heads up a few times. I whistled at

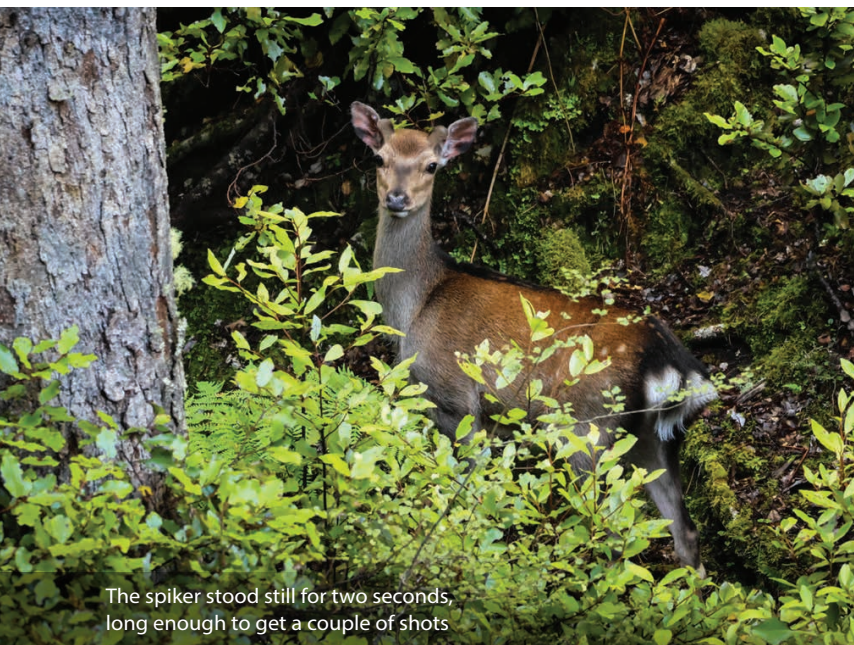
them, trying to get their attention to get a better photo before we lost all the good daylight, but they were onto us, and after looking our way for 30 seconds, they made their way slowly back into cover, leaving us to head back to camp for the night.

The night was a cracker and the stars were out in force. I asked the lads what they wanted to do the next day, and they said go for a swim. The plan would be to head upriver for the morning, have lunch up there and head back for mid-afternoon, when it would be nice and hot for a swim. The morning dawned a cracker, and with breakfast under our belts, we crept upriver to where I had cut my teeth hunting. It was a mixture of mānuka and scrub around the river edges and big beech coming down to the river further upstream. I had been up here many times and it was a nice bit of country with good roaring in April.

I had not been up here for a while and the damage from the cyclone last year was

evident as we followed the light trail up on the true left. We climbed a small spur and onto a terrace at the start of a side creek. I said to the family that we would sneak up here quietly and see if we could find a Sika having breakfast. Sidling up the creek, it was quite open; the creek was a little steep, but the open faces on the sides made it worth it, and the sign was abundant. I was ahead of the family by 20 metres when I spied a deer on the opposite face just upstream from us. It was a young Sika spiker with his head down, feeding into the creek.

I let the team know I had seen an animal, and they came forward, stopping five metres behind me and sitting down. The spiker dropped slowly into the creek and then he was nowhere to be seen! As I peered over the edge into the creek looking for him, I couldn't see below us as the pepperwood was too thick. I noticed a deer trail coming up out of the creek right below us and had the thought that with our luck, he would



The spiker stood still for two seconds, long enough to get a couple of shots



The lads resetting the stoat traps



An adult tom tit



Playing around in the creek on the cyclone damage

pop out only five metres away to find us sitting right in the open! After a few minutes, I saw movement below me, and spotted him walking up the trail, about to run right into us. **I slowly flicked the camera on and let off a few hurried shots while he stood still for two seconds, then he was gone back into the creek.** He ran back up the trail on the other side; I gave a mew and he pulled up beside a big beech tree, giving me a few vital seconds to snap a good photo before he carried on up the big face opposite, slightly more educated. I looked back at Amie and the lads, and they were all smiling. They had not seen him on the other side of the creek but when he came up the trail just below us on our side, they had seen him lift his head looking at me before spinning and departing. It was a very cool experience for all four of us.

The bird life was everywhere after the rain the previous day. We captured a few bird photos while heading back towards the main river, before turning right and

heading up further to an old deer trap for our intended lunch stop. As we crossed the next side creek, I quickly stepped on the rocks to avoid getting my feet wet. Not that wet feet bothered me at all, but more to see if the lads could cross the same way. James was first and followed my path perfectly. Next was little Fletcher, he didn't quite hit the rocks with the right pace and ended up on his back in the creek. His mother fished out the little fella, while his Dad and brother were too busy crying and laughing. **Fletcher was a bit mad at us for laughing but he came right after a while. Sorry, Fletch!**

Even under the cover of the big bush, the heat was noticeable as we moved upriver, making sure to stop a few times to rehydrate the little men and load them up with snacks. When making trips deep into the bush with young kids and to keep it enjoyable, you need to keep them interested, and don't slog too far all at once. Make sure you stop for breaks, load them up with water and food, and

ask them to lead the way when you can so they don't feel like they are being dragged on a huge walk in the middle of nowhere.

As we approached the location of the deer trap, we carefully manoeuvred through the shallow gullies until we reached the hidden clearing. I spotted a young Sika spiker sunning himself in the first open area and quickly snapped him before he could leave the scene.

We found shade on the clearing and unloaded the treats for lunch, while relaxing a bit for a well-earned rest. The clearing that the deer trap was on is man-made surrounded by deer fencing that has mostly fallen to the ground. It has a tiny creek flowing through the middle of it. **They used to land a helicopter in another clearing very close by back in the 70's when the price for live deer was at its height, catching the deer with nets by hand before loading them to the chopper and out to the buyers.** Subsequently, this area



Owner - Allan Foot

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A hind and fawn on the riverside

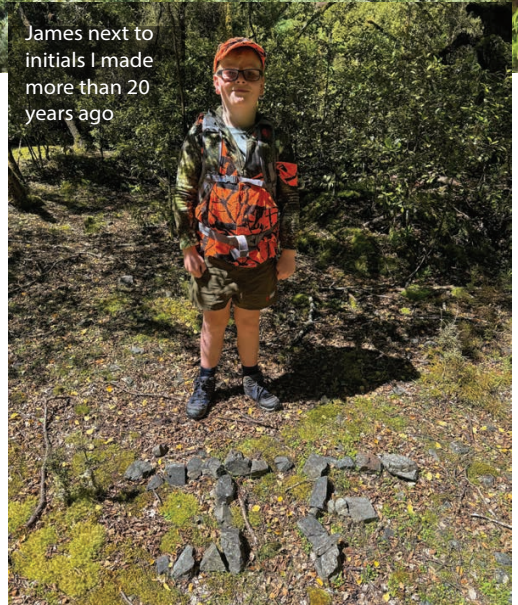
has been a great place to see deer over the years, as it has some grass, sun and easy stalking, and is right in the middle of the big beech trees.

We moved from the trap down to the main river and let the kids muck around on the logs while we enjoyed the sun, before slowly moving downriver toward camp.

Along the way, we noticed how many big dragonflies were around the creek. In all my years of hunting, I've never seen so many, with literally hundreds seen over the next few days. We also came across a few big fungi that the kids found fascinating, before arriving back at camp, stripping down and getting ready for a dip in the nearby creek. The water was a tad cold, but as it was so bloody hot, it was a very refreshing swim and the lads loved it. That night we listened to the moreporks while we played cards, and after the kids were asleep, Amie and I talked about how good it is with no outside distractions for the kids, no internet or phones and no worries!

Our last full day arrived and we decided to head downriver to bigger clearings. We slowly meandered down the creek, and it was not long before we realised that it was substantially hotter than the day before. I got a weather report on my In-reach when we stopped for a break and it was predicted to reach 30 degrees. It was already feeling well into the 20's and it was only mid-morning. I let the lads lead for a while, as they have done this plenty on previous trips, with a changeover of the leader every 20 minutes to avoid arguments. They have to navigate the tricky bits by themselves and can ask for directions if need be. They know they need to be observant and look ahead of them at all times for signs of the trail and the

James next to initials I made more than 20 years ago



easy way to head, while only going as fast as the slowest person in the party. Being the leader, you are responsible for the people behind you at all times. They soak up these learnings and are becoming very good in the bush, and are a pleasure to take on trips like this. I was not introduced to hunting until my uncle took me into Clements Mill Road for the first time when I was about 13 years old. **Hopefully, they will be taking their mates for hunts by 16.**

Stopping at times to make rock bridges



The lads being strapped in by Cam



The team swims in the heat

across creeks or make a hut is mandatory to keep kids interested. They love looking back and showing their mates the photos, as they will also do in the years to come. We weaved our way down the river, and as we broke out into the more open areas the sun was starting to get up. We searched the open mānuka and clearing edges for a while but nothing was seen. Maybe the deer were off having lunch in the shade too? **We pulled out the sandwiches and found a bit of shade to hide in.** The sky was sapphire blue, and everywhere we looked, it was paradise. Where else would you want to be on a day like this? We concluded the lunch feast enjoying the pockets of shade in the river, and set off back up river, taking time as we crossed it to get well wet. It was a pleasure to be splashed by the kids for once. We had been unlucky not to see any deer on the way down as there were plenty of small clearings along the river loaded with fresh sign; maybe they heard the elephants coming?

The mercury on the temperature gauge reached 31 by late afternoon, so we had a relaxing one sitting in the shade of the big mānuka back at camp. We were due for a 10 am flight out the next morning. **That night, we sat chilling out with a cold drink and reminiscing on a very cool few days of family time, time you simply can't replace.**

HINTS AND TIPS FOR TAKING THE KIDS HUNTING

1. Try and understand the capabilities of each party member by going for walks not far from home, so you don't over-commit them to a trip they will hate.

2. Ask them to write a list of what they need to take and go over it with them, so they get an understanding of what is needed while they are on the hill. Also include anything they want to do in the bush, so they feel like they are a part of the planning.

3. Take colouring books, notepads for keeping a daily diary, and anything else to keep them occupied while you are at camp. This will also help you to relax.

4. If rain is predicted, take some pancake mix or something to make or bake to pass the day. We try not to take any lpads or similar, but that might work for you. The adults need to relax so everyone has fun, and if that means letting them play a game, so be it.

5. Go and make a hut, help them put a roof on it and have a roof shout with fizzy drinks, or take the jet boil to the hut and make some hot chocolates.

6. In the summer make a bridge across a creek with rocks, or dam an area to make a small pool for swimming.

7. Take plenty of food with you and tell the kids when you get to the planned destination they can have a nice treat, to dangle the carrot!

8. Ask the kids to be observant and point out any deer prints, native birds, and bugs. This will help them learn to identify them and subsequently learn the ways of the bush faster. Knowledge is key.

9. Teach them ethics. We all have



The boys posing

different ethics and here are a few of my own rules that I have taught the kids.

- **Do not litter in the bush: you take it in, you take it out. Don't bury it.**
- **Look after others in your team and don't push someone too hard as that might make them hate it.**
- **If you use the firewood make sure you replace it with more than you burnt.**
- **If you come across anyone in the bush have a talk to them and make a plan that is safe for both parties before you carry on.**
- **Clean the camp up after you, even if the last party did not.**
- **Respect the bush and don't go around chopping random trees at campsites with hatchets. We are lucky to be able to use the bush the way we do, so respect it.**

10. Have a plan for all weather. Make sure you carry plenty of water, food and clothing for the kids. If you do a big walk one day be careful not to follow it with another the next day as the smaller kids won't have the stamina. To reiterate, make sure you know the child's capability and this will ensure everyone has a good time and wants to do it again.

Living the bush life is healthy for everyone. Make a plan of what you want for the kids then a loose plan of how to make sure they see the New Zealand bush, as there are always too many other reasons not to go.





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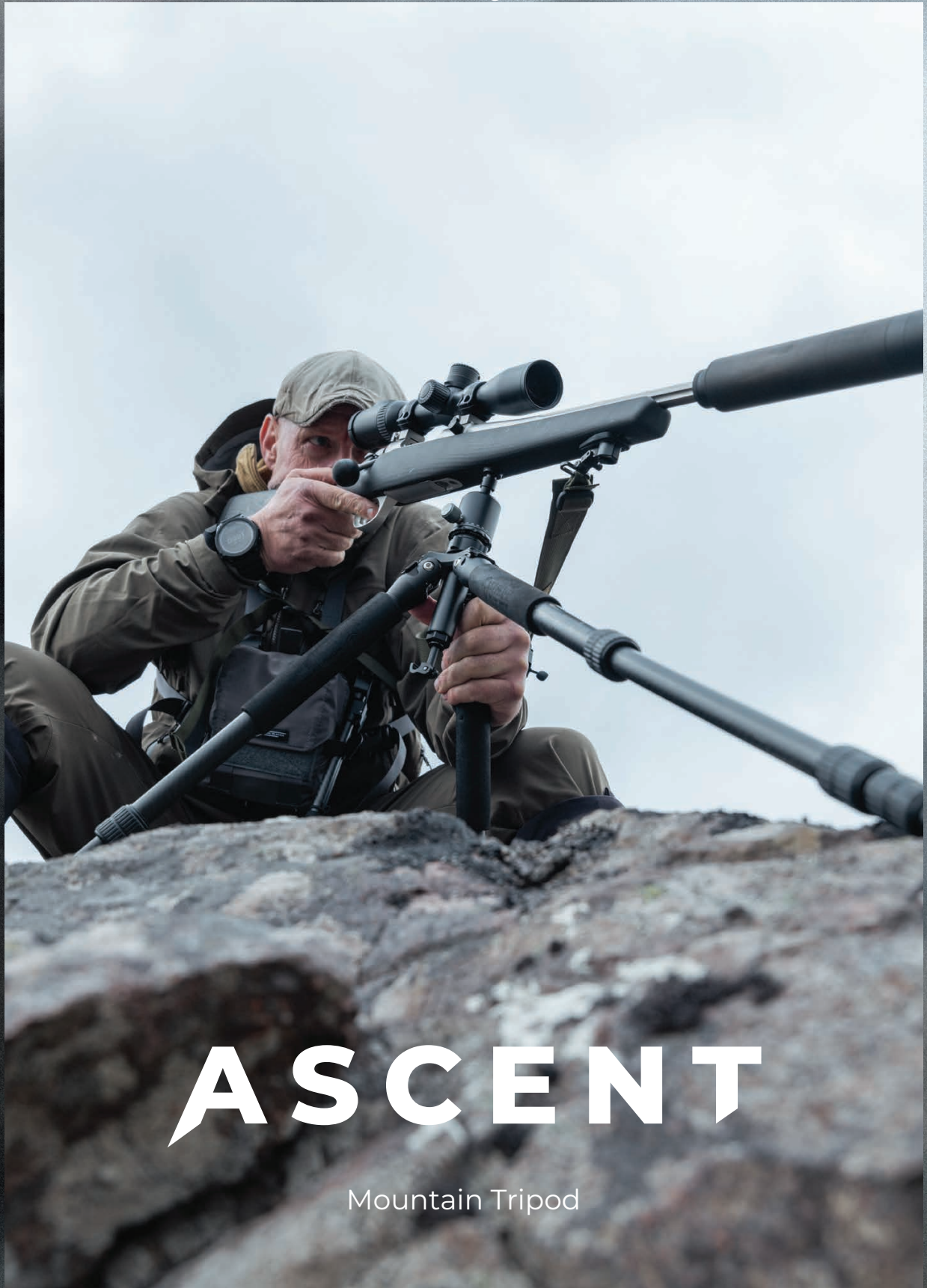
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This time up for the 7mm PRC we're giving its 24 inch barrel the chop – firstly to 22 inches and then on down to 20 inches

We currently build a lot of 20 inch barreled 7mm Remington Magnums as they are far handier to use with a permanently attached suppressor than a 24 inch or longer barrel while still providing ballistic performance that will get you out to 500 yards or so in a hunting situation, and the 7mm PRC being a little more efficient should work even better

Yes, we're going to lose velocity and some would say you may as well go for the 7mm-08 if you going to chop the barrel. But no, we have proved over and over you will still get significantly more velocity out of a 20 inch 7mm Mag than you will out of a 20 inch 7mm-08. Yes, you lose more velocity per inch with the larger capacity to bore ratio, but as you are starting so much faster you will still end up with more velocity – full stop.

So to 22 inches first which some might see as a good compromise of

performance and portability – also remembering that was the length of the Savage UltraLight's barrel we tested in Parts 1 and 2.

You can see in Table 1 that we lost pretty much 70fps in every example for the 2 inch shorter barrel, which is 35fps per inch. Interestingly we got slightly less velocity out of our 22 inch Hardy custom chambered barrel with the factory ammunition than out of the 22 inch Savage Ultralight. Unfortunately we couldn't measure pressure with the

Savage barrel or I'm sure we would have found those factory loads in that rifle were also showing more pressure. This tells us the specs of the Savage barrel and/or chamber were a little tighter than our custom chamber and barrel. This is totally expectable, as most manufacturer's barrels and chambers vary a little internally.

Next we cut the barrel to 20 inches and recrowned and threaded it so we could run the DPT magnum can again. Below are the results with the same loads again in Table 2.

Here you can see we lost less velocity for this 2 inch cut than we did for the one before. The handload up at 65,000psi lost 65fps, whereas the lower pressured factory loads only lost 40 to 50fps total, so 20 to 25fps per inch which is pretty good.

We then carried on and worked up loads with a range of lighter projectiles and a faster powder that will be more efficient in the shorter barrel – Reloder 23. This is our go to in the 20 inch barreled 7mm Magnums.

| TABLE 1 - 24" VS 22" VELOCITY COMPARISON | PRESSURE | 24" | 22" |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|
| 175gn ELD-X, 68.5gns Reloder 26 | 65,000psi | 3050fps | 2980fps |
| Hornady 175gn ELD-X Precision Hunter | 55,900psi | 2890fps | 2820fps |
| Federal Premium 175gn ELD-X | 58,100psi | 2928fps | 2855fps |

| TABLE 2 - 24", 22" AND 20" VELOCITY COMPARISON | PRESSURE | 24" | 22" | 20" |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 175gn ELD-X, 68.5gns Reloder 26 | 65,000psi | 3050fps | 2980fps | 2915fps |
| Hornady 175gn ELD-X Precision Hunter | 55,900psi | 2890fps | 2820fps | 2770fps |
| Federal Premium 175gn ELD-X | 58,100psi | 2928fps | 2855fps | 2815fps |

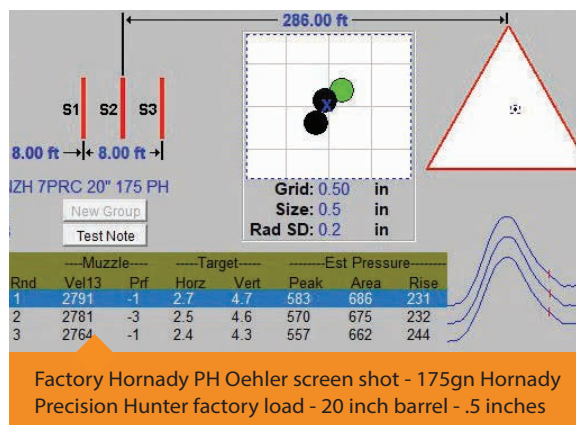


| TABLE 3 - RANGE OF LOADS FOR 20" BARREL | SEATING DEPTH | POWDER/GRAINS | PRESSURE | VELOCITY |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------|----------|
| 162gn ELD-X | Just touch | Reloder 26/ 70gns | 65,000psi | 3020fps |
| 162gn ELD-X | 45 thou jump | Reloder 23/ 67gns | 65,000psi | 2965fps |
| 160gn TMK | 35 thou jump | Reloder 23 / 67gns | 64,200psi | 2988fps |
| 150gn ELD-X | Just touch | Reloder 23 / 68gns | 63,200psi | 3047fps |
| 150gn Classic Hunter | 50 thou jump | Reloder 23 / 69gns | 64,800psi | 3063fps |
| 140gn TTSX | 50 thou jump | Reloder 23 / 70gns | 64,200psi | 3137fps |

Above are the results of that testing:

You can see that with the 162gn ELD-X Reloder 26 still produced more velocity than Reloder 23, even though more of it would have been unburnt and blown wasted out the muzzle. It's sort of the same thing as comparing a shortened 7mm Mag with a 7mm-08 - yes, Reloder 26 is less efficient but it still provides more performance. I have found though that it's easier to get a rifle to shoot accurately with the faster burning powder and correspondingly lower muzzle exit pressure – possibly due to less disturbance of the projectile. In this case none of the loads we tried shot quite as well as the loads we shot through the 24 inch barrel, which is quite unusual.

Usually most rifles shoot better when you shorten the barrel due to more rigidity/dampened harmonics. The best shooting handload in the 20 inch barrel was the 160gn Sierra Tipped MatchKing. This load was doing



Factory Hornady PH Oehler screen shot - 175gn Hornady Precision Hunter factory load - 20 inch barrel - .5 inches

almost 3000fps which is pretty good performance for such a compact and lightweight rifle. The Federal factory load that shot so well in the longer barrel was not as good in the 20 inch, and the slightly slower Hornady factory load shot best.

A comparison of the best performing loads. The drop is in inches from a 200 yard zero and the wind is in inches with a 90 degree crosswind.

| MANUFACTURE/ CARTRIDGE | BULLET WEIGHT | BC G7 | MUZZLE VELOCITY | 500 YARDS | | | 1000 YARDS | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------|--------------------|-----------------------|------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| | | | | REMAINING VELOCITY | DROP | WIND | REMAINING VELOCITY | DROP | WIND |
| Hornady 7mmPRC | 175gn ELD-X | .358 | 3000 | 2407 | 34.9 | 10.93 | 1886 | 221.3 | 50.34 |
| Hornady 28 Nosler | 162gn ELD-X | .321 | 3175 | 2498.6 | 31.9 | 11.29 | 1909 | 205 | 52.81 |
| Federal 300 Norma Mag | 215gn Hybrid | .348 | 3000 | 2391.5 | 35.4 | 11.4 | 1858 | 224.8 | 53 |
| Hornady 30/378Weatherby | 220gn ELD-X | .333 | 3025 | 2387.6 | 35.1 | 11.79 | 1832.6 | 224.8 | 55 |
| Hornady 338 Lapua | 270gn ELD-X | .372 | 2800 | 2250 | 40.6 | 11.98 | 1765.9 | 255 | 55.55 |

FACTORY AMMUNITION COMPARISON

That ends the testing and evaluation part of our mini-series on the 7mm PRC. I started off pretty optimistic this really could be a great new addition to the Kiwi hunter's caliber choice and so it has proved to be – especially if shooting factory ammunition and based around a Tikka medium length action. If you look at the specs of the whole range of Federal and Hornady factory ammunition across all chamberings/calibres, here is a factory spec table of the best performing loads ballistically (velocity verses BC). This includes heavy recoilers like the 300 Norma Magnum, 30/378 Weatherby or 338 Lapua – none of which fit in a Tikka action. The 175gn ELD-X 7mm PRC load is flatter than all but one and better in the wind than the lot. Federal have also discontinued the 300 Norma Magnum load that got close to the 7mm PRC, but again with more recoil. **Only the Hornady 28 Nosler 162gn ELD-X load is flatter, but not as good in the wind because its not factory loaded with the higher BC 175gn ELD-X like the 7mm PRC.** This is no doubt due to the 28 Nosler's 1 in 9 inch SAAMI spec twist which is really too slow for the heaviest



The .3 inch group I shot off a make shift rest was as good as the best the 20 inch barrel had shot on my home range, so it definitely likes the new stock!



The comb is as high as possible to get the best cheek weld and still be able to open the bolt

7mm Projectiles. Hornady got that right with the PRC!

HUNTER CLIMB HIGH

I was waiting for the first carbon fibre stock out of our new mould to replace the prototype, but it got held up a day and I had to head south without it.

We have been working on this upgrade from our earlier carbon fibre stock for a couple of years now. We have gone with a new manufacturer and a new mould, which will solve some of the supply issues we've had in the past. Our latest design is the lightest alpine hunting stock available

with aesthetically pleasing checkering for a sure grip and the highest comb possible for a good cheek weld - without needing adjustable comb hardware that always adds extra weight. It also has a quite vertical pistol grip with a low thumb position ideal for proper rifle and trigger control. The forend is slim enough so you can wrap your hand around it when using your rifle like a walking stick climbing a hill, yet wide enough to work with most bipods.

After a debacle with cancelled and delayed ferries I finally made it back down to Canterbury where I was heading in to help with some tahr

actually nearly beat me down there in the end, so I was able to swap them over, check the zero, and head for the hills. The .3 inch group I shot off a make shift rest was as good as the best the 20 inch barrel had shot on my home range, so it definitely likes the new stock!

Back to the hunting. A very early morning start saw me leaving the truck in the riverbed at daybreak and starting to climb. Nannies are usually very high this time of year, unless the snow has driven them lower. Even then they often hang out in the high altitude vertical bluffs where the snow can't build up, so they don't actually need to come lower into the danger zone. I climbed



The alloy bedding block from Gerald and Sam at Glacier Rifle Company provides a precise and consistent bedding platform. What a pleasure it is doing business with these professionals!



The group consisted of seven nannies and a 4 year old herd bull - still 3 years away from being mature enough to think about shooting. He had good tips so the potential was there - he just needed age!

about 800 vertical metres before I encountered tahr high up above me, and then planned a stalk to get me within range. I stopped when I got within 600 yards of them from a little knob that gave me a good rest. There was no wind to speak of so as long as I did my part it should have been a pretty sure thing. The group consisted of seven nannies and a four year old herd bull – still another four years away from being mature enough to think about shooting. **He had good tips so the potential was there – he just needed age!** Picking the most mature looking nanny in the group, I ranged her at 587 yards, dialed the PBC and squeezed off a shot when she stopped broadside. A very solid whack came back and over she went. The remaining group milled around uncertain of what to do with their leader gone, and I was able to pick off another couple of younger looking nannies that should be good eaters. Having shot three out of that group, I felt that was enough and packed up my gear for the retrieve. Luckily they rolled a long way down a scree and ended up in a similar spot so I only had to climb another hundred or so metres and drag one of the young ones a short distance to get them all together. Photo session, butchery session, then



The results of a successful morning, doing some tahr management out to 600 yards with the 7mm PRC

with heavy pack it was off down the hill to the truck feeling very satisfied with my morning.

Hornady's 7mm PRC is without doubt an adaptable, jack of all trades, do it all for NZ mountain hunting. You can run a full length 24 or 26 inch barrel if you want maximum long range performance and drive the 190gn A-Tip in excess of 3000fps. Carry your can or brake in your daypack and put it on when you are ready to shoot. Or you can shorten it up to 20

inches if you want a more portable rifle with can permanently attached, and still get a very useful almost 3000fps with the 160gn class of projectiles which worked nicely out to 600 yards tahr hunting.

The one glaring question that jumps out at me from all of this testing and discussion is this – when are Tikka and Sako going to chamber their rifles in the truly outstanding 7mm PRC! Watch this space...





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BALANCING ACT IN THE BALLOT BLOCKS

WRITTEN BY
PAT BARRETT

PART 1

It was a chance conversation with my wife when we were on holiday at Totaranui one year

I had been reading hunting magazines, including NZH, and was tempted by the prospect of being able to fly into one of those remote South Westland valleys, camp, and hunt tahr for a week. As a career tramp and occasional climber, I was already familiar with some of the locations, known for their challenging terrain and demanding conditions.

These places are defined by the intense effort required, not to mention frustration and apprehension. Carrying a pack load of gear and food for a week or more I would tramp into some of the most inhospitable places on earth. But flying into the wilderness, where you are normally unable to land at any other time, with all your kit – now this was game-changer.

“I’d love to do that one day” I ventured out loud one morning at the beach, handing Christine the magazine and pointing to the relevant passage.

There’s nothing like an in-your-face hint. She read the information - it was on how to apply for the tahr ballot - closed the page, handed the magazine to me and

said, “Go for it!”

I was amazed, but then I am an insufferable adventurer and we had been on many of those big trans-alpine trips together, including adventures throughout South America and parts of Asia. Still, it was a very generous response, for which I was, and am grateful.

As it was already January, and the deadline was in about two weeks so the pressure was on! I hadn’t long been back hunting at this point, having shelved my rifle many years back in favour of tramping and climbing and multi-sport events. As a result, companions for hunting were few on the ground, but I did have friend Owen, with whom I

shared access to a forestry block, and had shared a few recent tramps with Fr John, a Catholic priest - not a hunter, just a good keen man.

So, we had a small team together quickly, and in time to lodge our ballot.

A letter duly arrived on 10 February confirming that we had been allocated Edison River for the fourth period – late May.

TRIP ONE - THE EDISON

I knew nothing about the Edison, other than that it was in the famed Mahitahi catchment of South Westland, was high (1150 metres), and likely to be very cold.

But who was counting the negatives? Certainly not me; we were rapt that we were going, and soon!

Gear prep and food prep nights were planned in advance of the trip. A mountain radio was hired, tents were selected, cameras and rifles were ready, and a few prayers were offered for a safe trip and good weather.

Our camp kitchen in the Edison



Hunting up above camp



I believe it is a truism that the first time you try an activity, it is, in a particular way, always the best. Yes, follow-ups are just as exciting, but that flight into the wilderness on our first tahr ballot with James Scott in the pilot's seat in South Westland was unrepeatabe.

Rain streaked across the windscreen as we skimmed the paddocks and road near Karangarua, lifting clear of the ragged cloud and into a world of sunshine and mountains. The flight was very high, across the grain of the landscape, cutting through numerous headwater valleys and then through an impossibly square-cut gap in the Bannock Brae Range. The sheer serrated ridges rose up beside the machine, threatening to engulf it seconds before we flew through the gap into the blue space beyond. **Whoa, I hadn't seen that coming!**

Touchdown was tight in the little valley beneath Mt Strachan (2561 metres), and we were out, unloaded, and with James away again in minutes. The departure of the helicopter is a poignant moment for first timers, with the reality of what we were now up against finally dawning on us. This was different by an order of several magnitudes. We were committed 'til pick-up, with no hut available, way too much gear to ever consider walking out (unless we were to abandon most of it) and no immediate safe harbour. Just what we had, here and now.



Searching for tahr above the bluffs

The first test was on us in a flash – the wind. A southeasterly gale was forecast for later that day, and James had been anxious to get in and out before it rose. We copped it almost immediately after the machine had departed, with gusts roaring down the gulch in which we were camped and dealing to Fr John's budget tent in no uncertain fashion. We managed to re-erect it behind sheltering rocks, complete with a bandaged tent pole which fortunately lasted for the duration of the camp.

The rain came later. Sheets of it lashed the camp and our make-shift fly-kitchen, yet it barely made a dent in our enthusiasm and commitment. We had done this sort of camping before so were not unprepared for the bad days.

Soon enough the sun was back, and we were away to check out all those places we had spied on the way in. It's amazing

how 'flat' everything looks from the air. Some of those 'give-it-a-bash gullies' were either too steep or too choked with scrub and waterfalls to make them passable, but we did find some clear passages to the high, tops above camp – and some tahr.

The days drew on, and with them much-improved weather, apart from a brief snowstorm one evening. On

one mission we had an encounter. It was one of those moments I can still see today, and still regret, as it was a case of being unprepared for what it takes to bring down a monster tahr. Owen and I had just spied a nanny standing on a large, flat rock above the bluffs. I duly dispatched her, but she fell into oblivion and was never seen again. Turning around, I came face to nose with a massive bull tahr. He was truly a huge, hairy giant, less than 70 metres away, standing poised on a rock shard looking



Overlooking Abel Lake and camp



Our tent camp in the upper Perth

at us. He was also limping, with either an injury or illness. I didn't hesitate. Raising my .270 I fired into his shoulder feeling confident of the shot. He barely flinched! Then he dismounted the rock and limped off around the face, still presenting a good shot, which I dearly wanted to take but was thwarted by the presence of Owen standing between me and the bull.

By now it was too late, and he vanished into very steep terrain. We never even found a blood trail, leaving me frustrated and thinking the inevitable 'what-ifs?'

I realised later that my shot failed because I was using lightly constructed projectiles for deer - some 130grn soft points which were woefully inadequate for big, heavy animals like bull tahr at super close ranges. It is likely that the bullet didn't penetrate much at all, and probably just came apart long before reaching any vitals! This was a lesson I hope others

don't have to learn the hard way.

Our final day on this hunt was even more memorable. James was due at 2pm, so there was half a day left at best. Owen and I headed up behind camp onto the terraces, but there was a lot of new snow to hamper our progress, plus it was freezing cold in the pre-dawn and not at all pleasant, despite it being a fine day.

Around 10am I spied tahr up in some easily reachable bluffs. One was in a tight little gut that looked as though I could reach it and was presenting my favourite shot - centre-of-the-chest. Aim, steady, boom! He crumpled instantly and slid down the gut to its facing edge, but not over it! **This left me with a tricky little climb up through the deepening snow to grab it and push it over the edge.**

It was now midday. Just then, I thought I heard a helicopter, but as it was early I discounted it. However, it did make

me uneasy, so I hurried up, taking the head, back steaks, and hind legs before scampering on down through the snow.

As I crested the ridge some 200 metres above camp, feeling like the returning champion, a sight presented that caused a further adrenaline rush, as well as a feeling of dread.

The heli was in the middle of camp, with no tents in view. Then I noticed that the rotors were completely still and there were three figures stowing gear! Oh, no! It was James, arrived early and he was helping to break camp!

I literally fell down the slope back to camp. I was going so

fast, and arrived in a lathered mess, totally crestfallen that I had stuffed up so badly. James was nonplussed and assured me, it was, "No problem, gave me a bit of a rest".

I still felt bad, but not for long! I had my tahr, some great pictures of the machine, and we had another amazing flight out, even buzzing some tahr in the bluffs below Mt Dechen. It was incredible, as they jumped into space at our passing.

That first trip was, and still is, the best one.

TRIP 2 – ABEL LAKE BALLOT BLOCK – THE FREEZER

The following year we were in early, but our timing was a bit off, and we only managed to secure a block at Abel Lake in the Perth, in late June – a time when most are happy to be back home in front of the fire.

Research suggested that the campsite would receive the princely sum of two hours full sun each day if it was fine. That camp is on the valley floor at 1000 metres, so we knew it would be freezing in there, but the thought of just a little sun each day assuaged our doubts.

This year there were again three of us – Father John, my cousin Bernard, and me.

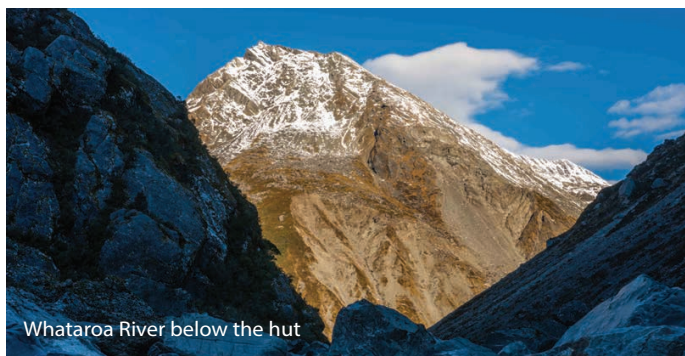
From the outset we lost two full days due to high winds before flying in on day three, to be deposited in 300 mm of snow by mid-morning. We had a good set-up this time, with a better kitchen and more comforts, which was just as well, because although it was fine and clear the rest of the week, that sun only reached us at 1pm and was gone again exactly 40 minutes later! It was like living in the freezer all week, with the only respite



Set up for mass at camp



Owen at Whymper Hut



Whataroa River below the hut



Looking across Whymper Hut and the Whataroa River to the Barrowman Valley

being to climb the cliff behind camp in search of tahr - or perhaps for the sun? Anyway, apart from frozen feet and hands all day and every day, we had a great time and saw a few tahr that were mostly impossible to reach in icy, near vertical gullies. There were incredible views of the Garden of Eden snowfields, (which I had crossed many years earlier). We did spot a lone bull to the north of camp and dutifully tracked him early one morning through huge, snowy boulders and steep moraine walls surrounding the erstwhile Abel Lake. **He gave us the slip.**

The last afternoon we discovered a taped track, of sorts, through the boulder maze near camp, up onto a spacious shoulder above the scrubline. I explored it further and found it led to where the tahr lived in reasonable numbers, and they were accessible! Unfortunately, it was now way too late in the day to continue on to reach a shooting position, and I had to reluctantly leave and head back to camp for fly-out at 9am next morning. That was a tough decision, but considering the year before I wasn't keen to try my luck again!

TRIP 3 - ADAMS RANGE BALLOT BLOCK AKA WHYMPER HUT

We were doing well with the blocks on our third time in and scored Adams Range overlooking the Poerua Valley at 1361 metres. As it faces northwest it looked to attract good sunlight hours each day. We were definitely not keen to do the "fridge" experience again so soon. Unfortunately, one of the party got the dates wrong after the block had been allotted to us. He remains nameless, but suffice to say we had to relinquish Adams Range to some lucky waitlisters and go for an out-of-ballot area - the Whymper Hut in the upper Whataroa Valley. A hut, with sun, and a warm bunk! Now, there was a draw-card.

Whymper Hut is a special place: remote, secure and unimaginably spectacular. It is directly beneath the western side of the Alps with Elie de Beaumont, towering 3109 metres over the valley head. Plus, there is good access

to a range of hunting country.

We had a full week of fine weather, no snow at the hut, and got in a lot of hunting hours and some wow-moment views. I took a lot of photos, but the only tahr we saw were at extreme heights and in extremely exposed situations, as in death-waits-at-every-step-if-you-venture-up-here sort of exposure.

One morning we did, however, spy a large buck chamois in the river below the hut, but muffed the shot.

We explored a lot - there is a good track, though rough and steep, down river and lots of terrain to wander through, but hunting was poor. Even the heli pilot said it had been a poor season for most. Yet it was a grand trip in fantastic terrain with two superb flights and great companions.

TRIP 4 - SPURS HUT CONSOLATION

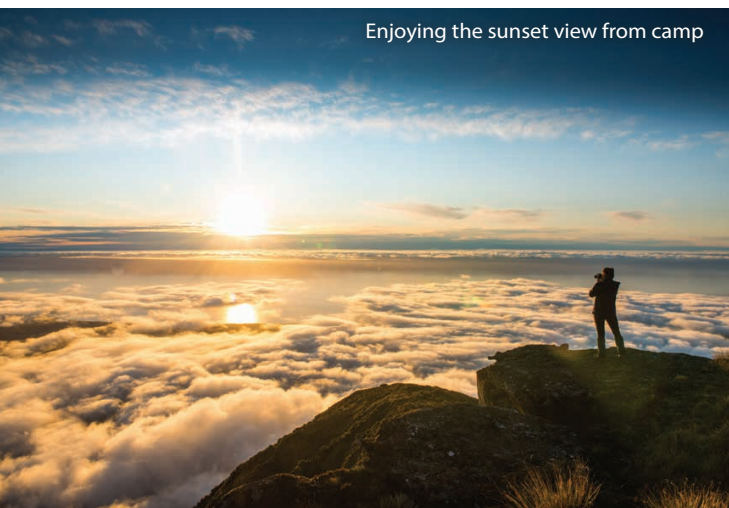
With no block won this year and shocking weather forecast over the entire South Island for the week - heavy rainfalls, high winds, snow and



Spurs Hut



James Scott from Fox & Franz Heliservices



Enjoying the sunset view from camp



A bull we scored barely half an hour from camp

There were a few respites, but then it rained – hard. Mostly we stayed in the hut, semi-comatose in our sleeping bags, only getting up for necessities – and another cuppa. **Each morning, when I awoke, I prayed that it would be a better day.**

Sometimes the sun was out but then we would get steam-rolled by that gale, roaring in like an escaped lion ready to devour anything standing, even the hut.

It was a continual din, and outside the 'lion' was completely unleashed and would thrash us to and fro like a plaything. It was intolerable. Even so, I managed to reach the tops on the Ben McLeod Range northwest of the hut. But that was where the wind lived, so

it wasn't a repeatable experience, and memorable for all the wrong reasons. The last day and walk-out was, as expected, fine, clear, sunny, and utterly, completely, numbingly – still! There was not one whisper of wind; it was like we had journeyed to a distant planet and disembarked into a paradise of peace.

The walk out was the best part of the whole week!

TRIP 5 – NON-BALLOT BLOCK TRIUMPH

Surely, after our three previous trips, there had to be some redemption coming?

We missed out in the Ballot, which was

a big disappointment considering our selections and dates – Landsborough and Wanganui in late May.

Undeterred, I had a plan up my sleeve. In fact, I have a few these days, for when we miss out, having learned from the North Opuha experience. This particular place, which I am forbidden to mention, comes from the pages of a hunting magazine some years back with tabs kept on it for just such an occasion.

We had a big team this year, five of us, including my youngest daughter, for her first fly-in trip, and two non-hunters. **Plus, we had an extremely encouraging weather forecast for the West Coast – fine all week!**

The first stop was Fox Glacier for a night and dinner at the pub, which is a great extra for any trip out west, then fly-in first thing next morning, without any issues. We set up camp, cooked some early lunch and headed out the same day for a recce.

Nathan, my hunting mate, spotted the game first as he had left early. He called us in, so it was barely an hour later that I was lining up on a bull tahr at 405 metres, up in the bluffs. The shot made it cartwheel off the ridge into space and crash into a deep gully where we managed to retrieve the skin, head and meat. This was the first day! He was a bit over 11 inches, and in the years before we appreciated the importance of age.

Later in the week, my daughter scored a bull of a similar size. It was an exciting and protracted hunt after it was wounded, and then jumped on by Nathan when it bolted down a small stream and was finished with his knife – not your usual tahr hunt!

On day four I scored a deer, a large Red hind for meat. Nathan scored another tahr, this time with the rifle, and we all enjoyed a week of magnificent views, sunsets, laughter, camp stories, and great meals on what was one of the most memorable and successful hunts we had all done.

That covers half of our annual ballot balancing act; keep an eye out for the next edition.



flood warnings - we were left second-guessing the weather conditions and where in the South, we might go. Rivers were already high, and due to go higher, so 4WD trips into the hinterland were not an advisable option. The West Coast was a wash-out, with parties cancelling throughout the week; even flying into the east coast valleys was a no-go with extreme winds forecast. So only two of us were keen to go. In the end, we went for a safe option, the North Opuha, near Fairlie.

The hut offered us some refuge from the storm, but it was also exposed and it was blowing hard, unpleasantly so, when we arrived. How hard? Hard enough to blow you and pack over! It stayed this way all week.

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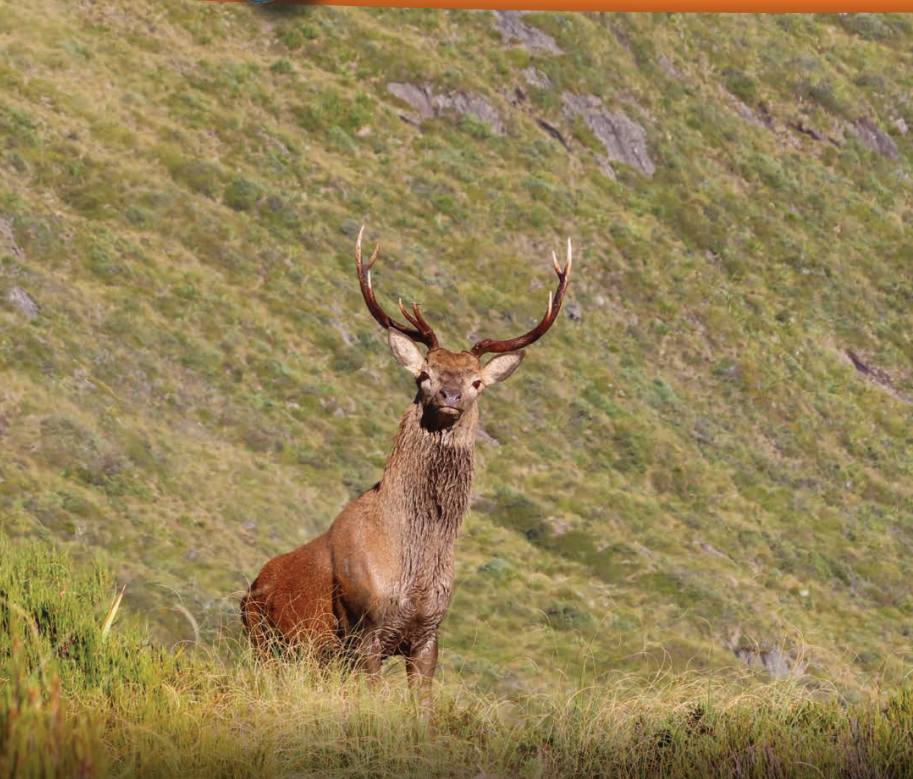
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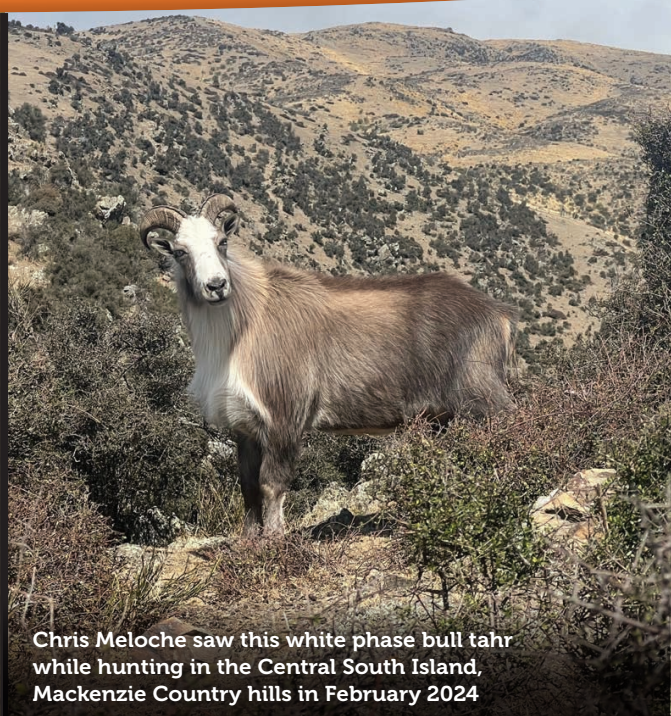


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A young West Coast stag that managed to sneak past the other hunting parties around us and come in for a look - Kyle Wills



Chris Meloche saw this white phase bull tahr while hunting in the Central South Island, Mackenzie Country hills in February 2024



A curious young tahr - Matt Brake



A bull tahr showing huge promise - Joseph Peter



A couple of inquisitive Fallow - John Lumsden

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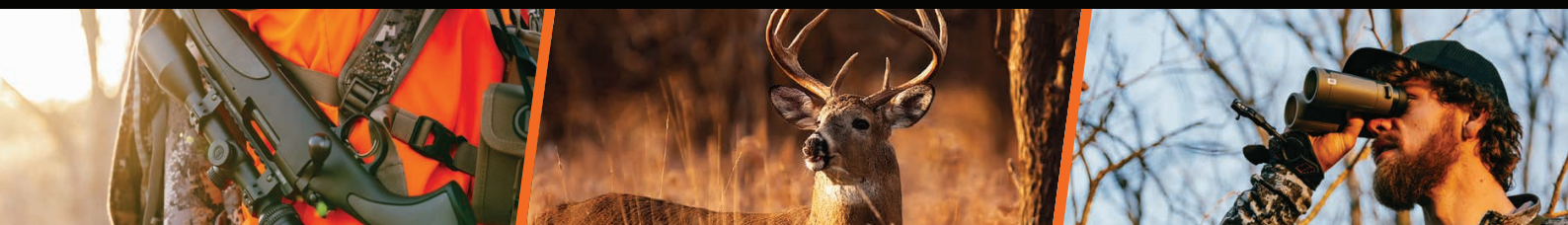


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Optimal tahr management

WRITTEN BY ~ GEOFF KERR

TAHR HUNTERS, WHETHER SELF-GUIDED OR COMMERCIALY GUIDED, ARE HIGHLY MOTIVATED BY THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOOT A MATURE OR TROPHY BULL. THE WORD "TROPHY" CAN BE CONTENTIOUS OR MISLEADING BECAUSE IT IS USED DIFFERENTLY BY DIFFERENT HUNTERS, AND SOMETIMES NEGATIVELY. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME HUNTERS USE AGE AS THEIR CRITERION FOR WHETHER TO HARVEST A BULL TAHR, WHILE OTHERS MIGHT LOOK AT THE QUALITY OF THE MANE, "CHARACTER", OR SOME OTHER CHARACTERISTIC

Other hunters are focused on scores under either the SCI, Douglas, or Duke of Bedford scoring systems. Despite all that variation, horn length of 12 inches is a broadly accepted minimum, 13 inches is better, and 14 inches is right up there. It's impossible to devise a single best management strategy to optimise outcomes for all of these objectives so I'm going to consider age.

Just as farmers manage their stock to improve the characteristics of their herds, it is possible to do the same for wildlife. This happens in many foreign jurisdictions, where limits on age, points, curl, or other attributes constrain what animals may be harvested. We do the same in New Zealand for fish, and most people accept that. Harvesting the small fish

means there won't be many big fish!

The history of introduced game animals in New Zealand began with harvest limits designed to husband the resource, but these disappeared once game animals were designated (whether rightly or wrongly) as pests. While deer farmers and game estate operators manage their game herds, the same is not true of wild game, which is essentially open-slaughter.

While the ability to hunt where we like, when we like, and to harvest what we like on public land has a lot of appeal, it suffers from the Tragedy of the Commons. Individuals making decisions in their own best interests degrade the resource to the detriment of all. That doesn't mean we necessarily need rules to improve hunting opportunities - unregulated social change often helps to address the Tragedy of the Commons. For example, the increased prominence of catch-and-release fishing provides everyone with more opportunities to catch fish, especially large fish.



While catch and release isn't as realistic an option for hunting, other social change is happening, albeit with less prominence. A great form of catch and release is publishing pictures of animals that were not shot. It might be argued that getting a publishable photo is more difficult than killing that animal, so is more meritorious, even if the animal can't be measured with a tape. The Fiordland Wapiti Foundation has supported this activity in the print media, and social media "live trophy" posts are common. Other actions supporting social change include Sika Foundation persuasion for hunters to take the "right" Sika - shoot the hind not the yearling stag. **There have been several excellent media articles educating hunters on how to age and/or identify trophy quality animals, with the purpose of helping hunters to leave animals to mature until they achieve appropriate status.**

Whether these activities are sufficient to protect mature bull tahr/ trophy production capabilities is unknown. The recent past has seen historically large numbers of mature bull tahr being killed. However, the Department of Conservation is actively working to reduce the number of tahr, which raises concerns in the hunting community about the ongoing availability of mature animals. There are some crucial unknowns which will require continual adaptation as tahr herd

size and structure evolve. We don't know how many tahr there are, and we don't know how many tahr are killed but not recorded. While the Department of Conservation records their kills and does not actively target identifiable male tahr (except in the national parks), the same is not true for other hunters. Department of Conservation aerial monitoring provides some information on relative abundance of nanny, bull and juvenile tahr, but categories are not age-defined. While extensive historic research by the likes of Graeme Caughley, Ken Tustin, John Parkes and David Forsyth provides some key insights into tahr characteristics, demographics, diets and impacts, the picture is far from complete.

The Himalayan Thar Control Plan, which currently guides tahr management, sets maximum numbers of tahr in each management unit before the Department of Conservation "intervenes". The sum of these maxima across all

management units is about 10,000 tahr. Counting tahr is a lot harder than it sounds, but let's suppose we have a herd of 10,000 tahr and want to manage the herd to maximise sustained mature bull tahr harvest. **I'm not suggesting that 10,000 tahr is the "right" number, we don't know what that is and it should be determined from place-based understanding of tahr environmental impacts** – essentially tahr impacts on local vegetation. If the right number was (say) 20,000 tahr, then just double these figures, and so on. So, let's investigate what the ideal structure of a herd of 10,000 tahr could look like, and how many trophies could be harvested each year. Note that this is a "thought experiment" because many tahr hunters, guides and government officials independently decide what tahr to kill. It might not be either desirable or possible to achieve the optimal outcome, **but let's see what that hypothetical herd looks like in the table below.**

| DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP | HERD STRUCTURE | ANNUAL HARVEST |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| KIDS & JUVENILE TAHR | 4,207 | 0 |
| NANNY TAHR | 3,079 | 492 |
| BULL TAHR 2-5 YEARS | 2,271 | 0 |
| BULL TAHR 6 YEARS AND OLDER | 445 | 178 |
| TOTAL | 10,002 | 670 |



Tahr populations will always require management. They have adapted to our environment well and thrive without any predators. It is important to be aware of tahr habits to make sure control is directed at the right animals. A summer mob of bulls, such as pictured here, will likely be the only bulls within a radius of several kilometres - spreading their impact over a large area. Whereas the female group below will confine themselves to an area of only a few hectares, impacting vegetation heavily in those numbers.

With our hypothetical herd of 10,000 tahr it is possible to sustainably harvest about 178 bulls 6 years or older each year. Only a small proportion of those 178 bulls will exceed 12 inches. Under this scenario the Bull:Nanny ratio would be 0.88:1, compared with an historic ratio of 0.45:1 based on DOC aerial observations between 2016 and 2019. In other words, an optimal future scenario would entail having twice as many bulls per nanny compared with the recent past. Whereas in the past 20% of tahr observed were recognisable bulls, in the best possible scenario 27% of tahr are recognisable bulls.

Achieving this best possible herd structure with 10,000 tahr would drastically reduce the numbers of nanny tahr that need to be killed each year – killing about 500 nanny tahr each year would maintain the herd at the 10,000 tahr total. That's a lot less than are being killed now. Between 2020 and 2023 DOC's control operations alone culled 3,000~7,000 tahr per year, mostly nannies and juveniles. Total annual kills in this period would have been much more after including recreational hunter, commercial hunter, and Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH) offset kills. Reduced control intensity would be a result not only of a reduction in total herd size, but also from a change in tahr herd demographics.

We need to be careful interpreting and applying these numbers. Adaptive management will be crucial because it is not possible to accurately count the tahr population using the current estimation method or any other method. No abundance estimation method that could be applied to wild tahr is precise (the 95% confidence intervals of most estimation methods are wide – typically plus or minus 40%), and accuracy is unknown (the most likely numbers

produced by estimation methods are frequently different to each other and, where it has been possible to test against a known population, significantly different to the known population). What's more, like other animals, tahr reproductive success and natural mortality rates vary with tahr density – there is very limited information on that.

However, we can take home some important messages for managing a mature bull tahr resource:

- » There will be a significantly higher Bull:Nanny ratio
- » Because there are relatively few nanny tahr, a given tahr population can be maintained by a small annual nanny tahr harvest
- » Don't shoot juvenile tahr
- » Don't shoot young bull tahr
- » A herd of 10,000 tahr cannot maintain the current mature bull harvest

Clearly, managing the tahr herd to optimise mature bull potential, whatever the tahr population, entails a significant change in hunter behaviour – all hunters need to play their part to get this outcome, there would need to be a significant culture shift to more selective

harvest.

If in the future there are only 10,000 tahr (or even 20,000 tahr), there is going to be an issue of who gets to shoot the relatively small number of mature bull tahr. Not restraining mature bull harvest will greatly reduce future mature bull harvests, which is a very real risk under continuation of the current unrestricted harvest system. That would adversely affect all hunters, whether they be recreational, guided or aerially assisted.

The hunting sector should recognise that their common future will be defined by their own actions and come up with a plan. Different hunting sub-sectors (recreational hunters, guides, wild animal recovery, aerial assisted trophy hunting) will likely lay the blame on other sub-sectors, wanting them to change their behaviours. That won't solve anything - hunters need to recognise that we are all in this together. With fewer tahr, if each of us carries on doing what we are doing now it is almost certain to be significantly worse for everyone than if we all changed a bit. Let's start that conversation, especially with the prospect of a tahr Herd of Special Interest on the horizon.





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WRITTEN BY ~ DONOVAN GIBBS

LAND OF THE FREE

It's amazing what a little confinement will do

Early on during Level 1 lockdown, I'd made the decision to prepare for a trip once we reached Level 3. The goal was to pull off an epic solo mountain hunting trip and discover some new hunting areas along the way.

Timing with work meant holding off till the last week of May. There was a good weather forecast for the week and the trip was on. Arriving at the car park, the rifle was strapped onto the pack with trekking poles in hand for the two-hour climb to the halfway point and a cup of tea at the hut. A stag hee-hawed about half an hour short of the hut and understandably didn't respond to my very average roar in reply.

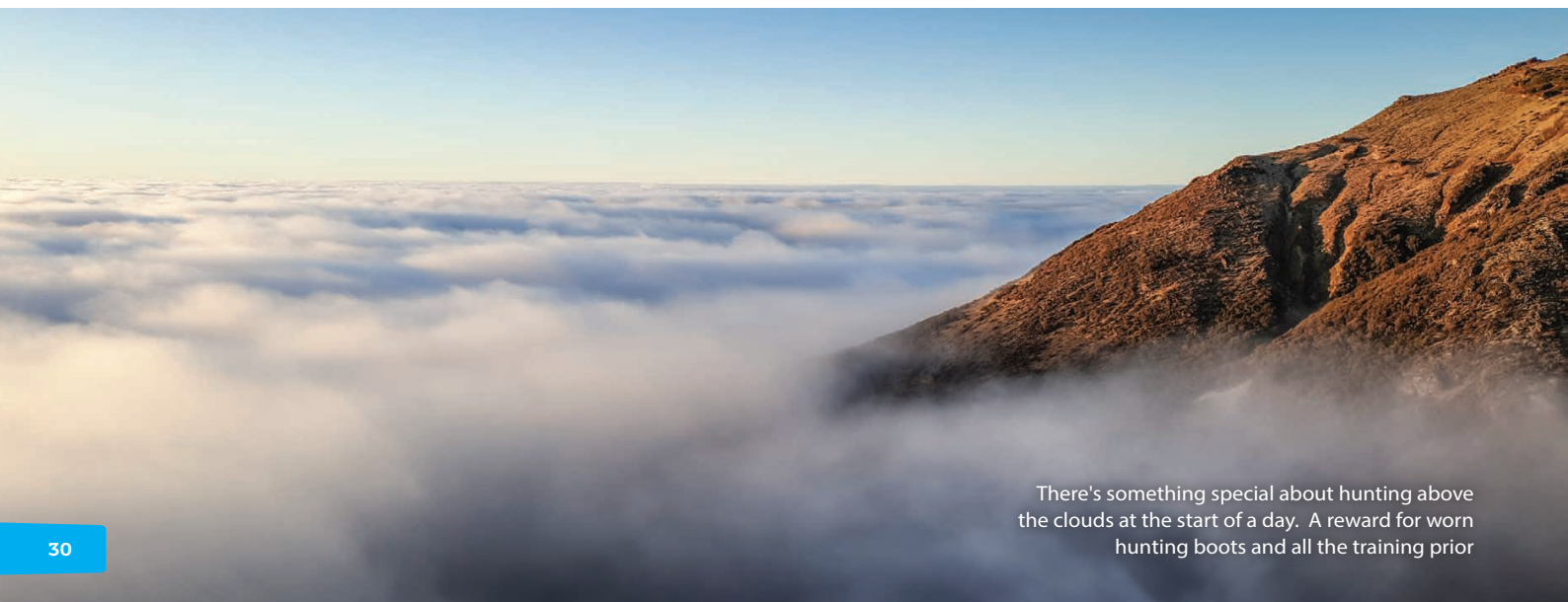
The outside of the hut was littered with fresh stag droppings. The local herd was safely tucked away in the tight mānuka stands melting into the surrounding snow-damaged beech forest. After downing some two-minute noodles

and loading another eight litres of water into the pack for the tops, the next hour and a half was spent climbing from the hut up to the first camp. Clag was rolling in from the east, soon covering the slopes. The tent was pitched in darkness just after 5.30 pm.

Day two was spent glassing the slopes in the valley system. A move was made every hour or so to get a different angle on the folds, the tussock, the forest and the river's end, seeking any movement. The only success was a "deer" spotted 500 yards away at the base of a mānuka stand (unfortunately she hadn't moved by the morning of day three, for she was, in fact, a "stone deer"). Fresh sign

littered the forest, and a group of deer screamed at each other in the early hours. However, nothing was seen during the day. But that was okay, as the plan was to rest while glassing after the big climb on day one. After a couple of hours of glassing on the morning of day three, it was time to adjust the plan. I packed up and climbed up and out to the next ridge system.

The trekking poles were proving invaluable, not just at protecting the knees, but enabling steady footing on the steep climb up and out of the basin, navigating along the ridgeline, glassing each face out to a kilometre away. Nothing was out on the southern faces exposed to the autumnal sun's rays. After a short lunch enjoying the view down to the Kawekas, and hearing the odd stag roar, and odd rifle shot, it was time to move. Picking a southerly route across the craggy ridgeline, a sunny valley presented excellent glassing opportunities.



There's something special about hunting above the clouds at the start of a day. A reward for worn hunting boots and all the training prior



Home for the first night



The Sika were tucked in the tight manuka stands enjoying the winter's sun. I'd spent a couple of days glassing and not seen a single animal out in the open

Cresting the top of a ridge that descended into tussock guts, gravel, mānuka stands there were plenty of spots from which to glass. The valley just screamed deer. The clay at the fringe of the tussock revealed recent sign, the most telling being the large hoof marks made in the sand wandering down the hill.

Picking a rocky knob to sit on, I let out an embarrassingly poor Sika roar and began to glass. It was 1.30 pm. A bit dazed from the hike, I was secretly enjoying basking in the sun. Relaxing, I reflected on what constituted a great trip.

In my mind the whole experience of having prepared for a couple of months prior, climbing mountains, glassing above the clouds, and camping where the trail led to new ground... this trip had ticked all the self-determined boxes. I also pondered why I'd lazily left my rifle ten metres behind at the base of the knob. At that very moment, I noticed movement below my eye line under the knob. An elegant stag leisurely sauntered 60 yards below from left to right, emerging from the mānuka stand on the exposed scree face. Sitting above him, I realised that he couldn't see me. I spun around and boosted up the slope to grab my rifle. Maybe, just maybe, he wouldn't see or hear me.

Reaching my rifle, I spun around and spotted the stag which had just reached the mānuka line and was about to disappear. From his body language, it appeared he hadn't cottoned on to the danger above. With no time to make a rest,

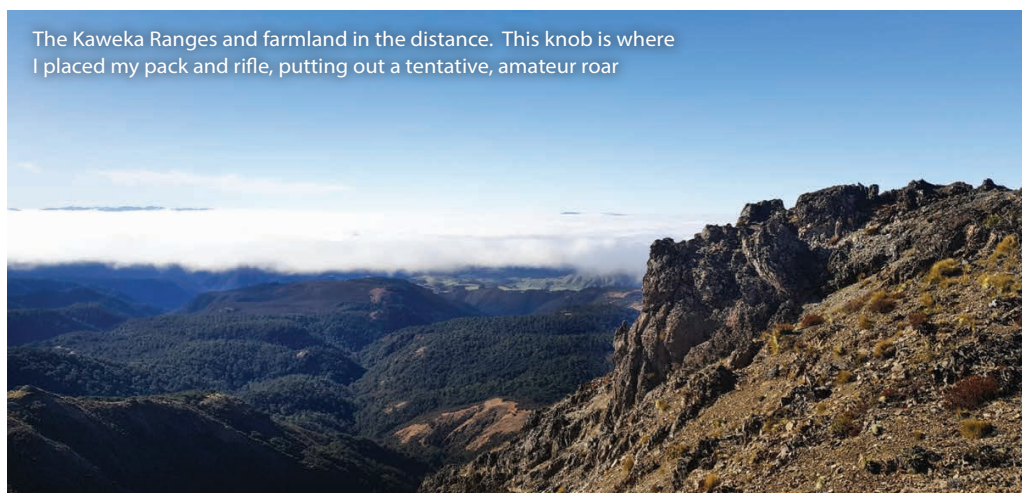
I crouched down, placed the crosshairs on his shoulder, and squeezed a round from 80 yards. At the shot, he rolled over, hooves kicking in the air, his body partially obscured by the tussock and mānuka scrub. I couldn't make him out clearly enough to place a second shot, but everything felt good. It appeared the months of containment spent dry firing the rifle in between Zoom meetings in the home office had paid off.

To give the animal some time, I went up to my gear lying on the ridgeline and tried to remain calm and occupy myself. Gingerly chambering another

round and making sure the cast shell was safely stowed, I picked my way down the shingle. There he lay.

A beautiful bush stag, that had come in to my own crude roar. I was blown away. He wasn't a large stag; but over four years old and sporting five gnarly points. But, he was a Kaweka public land stag and, more importantly, taken cleanly, so would make fabulous eating. I spent the next hour taking all the meat I could - back straps, front and back legs, tenderloins, rib flaps, neck meat and offcuts, all cooling on the surrounding mānuka scrub before going into the kill

The Kaweka Ranges and farmland in the distance. This knob is where I placed my pack and rifle, putting out a tentative, amateur roar





I'd taken up one of Greg Duley's tips during lockdown and practiced off hand dry firing my rifle balancing a coin at the end of the barrel. (Possibly during the odd never ending Zoom meeting). Turns out it was well worth it. The off hand, downhill shot dropping the stag on the spot



To me it doesn't get much better than this. Hunting Sika in the stunning Kaweka Ranges. They are the most graceful of creatures

bag for carry out. I opted to take the head, stoked to be able to take out the majority of the animal

After re-organising my gear, I gingerly picked my way up the hill where I opted for another session of glassing. Perhaps the big stag could be enticed out of the mānuka. Closer to 5 pm, the valley quickly descended into autumnal shadows and it was time to make camp. Picking my way through the tussock sand bowls following well-used deer trails covered in fresh sign, it became clear this was a bedding area. **My suspicions were confirmed after darkness fell. What sounded like a very large animal noisily approached my tent.** Unzipping the vestibule with a protective rifle in hand, the deer had faded into the darkness. So, this is where they live.

I took my time packing. The weight of meat meant I would have to take care moving down the clay pans and shingle slopes and pick my way through the mānuka belt to find the adjoining DOC track. The trip would take close to six hours all told, so I'd have to pack well and look after myself along the way, resting where I could. The trekking poles were proving to be the find of the trip, and saved me from a few slips along the way. Eventually, a deer trail through the last mānuka belt led me into the beech forest. Reorganising the pack, poles strapped on, rifle in hand, I noisily bush stalked for the next hour, with the odd roar and mew thrown in to mix it up. Nothing spotted. **The snow damage really made things tough. I followed the track, slowly creeping down the valley toward the river.** Suddenly the peaceful sounds of the bush were disturbed by a very loud "Bew". I'd been busted by a fleeing hind. Quickly raising the rifle I watched her ghost into the native. She followed at a distance, obscured in the mānuka, complaining for the next 15 minutes as I

continued along the track.

Arriving at the empty hut, the log book revealed only five hunters had entered their details since Level 2, with only one deer being shot. There had been one hunter there the day before, which explained the boot marks on the way out. There were a couple of surprises on the final two-hour sprint down the track, the first being the discovery of a feral kitten caught in one of the traps. This animal was at least ten clicks away from the closest farmhouse. This is really concerning given this is an area where DOC releases juvenile kiwi. The second surprise was encountering a strong stag smell a couple of times in the grassy areas by the mānuka stands and open grass flats a couple of hundred metres before the car park. **On another trip, I would run into a big stag on a late night walk in this area.**

The trip had provided an amazing experience with new areas explored, boundaries extended and

many lessons learned. I'd watched the legend Chris Crosse ferrying hunters in his yellow bird to distant huts over the last couple of days of the trip. Although I'd looked forward to my turn in the yellow bird at the time, it did make me ponder how often the closer spots are overlooked. I wish I'd booked with Chris while he was still operating. **But, for the price of a little boot rubber, the beech valleys, mānuka scrub, claypans, and shingle ridges of the Kawekas are yours.**



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NEVER SAY NEVER

WRITTEN BY ~ DWIGHT GRIEVE

A low groaning roar floated across Lake Te Anau from Fiordland National Park, wafted across by a gentle westerly breeze

I love running on the Te Anau foreshore in late March evenings as the stags start roaring. The anticipation of getting out into the bush to hunt gets hard to contain every time you hear another stag bellow its frustration.

My mate Andrew and I traditionally head out every roar for three or four days, camping in the nearby Takitimu Mountains. Our regular morning coffee catch-ups transition from mundane family or work stories to organising the hunt and guessing when the stags will be going nuts. The 2022 roar was a fizzer with a 1080 drop destroying the deer numbers and only one stag located groaning. We managed to stalk in on him, and he was a very lonely old boy with the ugliest head I've ever seen. I remember having him repeatedly groan a mere 100 metres away before spotting him loping towards us with an arrogant stride, a huge body with swayed back and pedicles down on the skull. **It is something primal to be so close to such a magnificent animal; it sends a tingle down your spine.**

Twelve months on, and we were shining a positive light on the situation with dreams of rampant roaring stags in all directions. I had a new job and some serious running training/racing at the same time, so the yearly roar hunt was down to a three day jaunt. The pressure was on but, to

be honest any time in the hills, however short, is bliss, as life always gets in the way of good hunting.

I can't even remember how I met Andrew, it was so long ago. We once decided to go out hunting together and we have not stopped since. It is a great relationship; **Andrew usually lets me shoot the deer and then allows me the privilege of all the gutting, butchering and carrying most of the meat, while he gets out the jetboil, makes coffee, and provides advice.** But, wait a minute - to be honest, it is a great system, and when in camp, by jingo the man can cook! No one else has ever made me rib eye steak with blue cheese sauce in a hut in the middle of nowhere. We also have the time-honoured hunters skill of talking bulls@#t together down to a fine art.

In 2023 the forecast was less than ideal, but with only a short walk planned, we carried in plenty of comfort.

We have a good knowledge of our selected area and had decided that year

to camp in the bush on the edge of an area that is often the intersection of three different stag-holding areas.

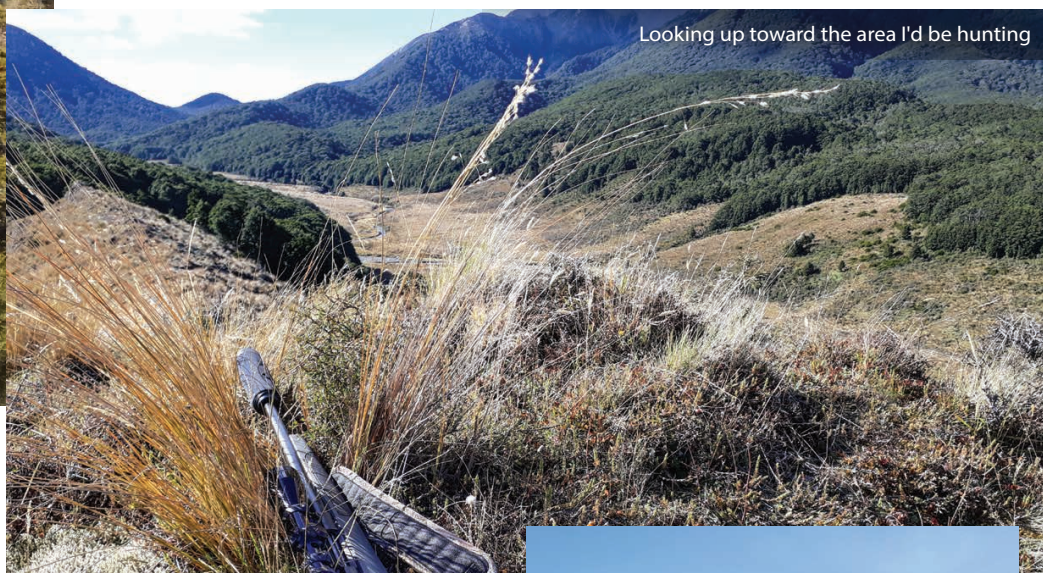
In quick order, the camp was up and we were off. Andrew has an area that holds a stag that we have never managed to get; we have been close so many times. Two years previously, we had followed him up into the alpine scrub and he was only a mere 20 metres away and going mental, but still, he managed to ghost off on us, never to be seen. The year before that, Andrew managed to climb above him in the alpine scrub tops and watched as he roared and stirred his hinds up, no shot was presented due to the thick scrub, but the stag held huge brow tines and three on top of each antler. So the first night's

The ugly old boy from the year before





You've got to love the Takis



Looking up toward the area I'd be hunting

plan was to sit on the edge of his domain and try to catch him out. Darkness came, and not a peep was heard anywhere; we had hoped the big boy had survived the 1080 drop, but this was the second year in a row we failed to hear a thing from him. We were a bit disheartened as we started back to camp in the failing light, but things picked up a bit as Andrew spotted an animal through a gap in the bush. Way up on top of a peak in front of us, a stag briefly made an appearance heading up to the brow of the peak. It was a fleeting view at a long distance; all we had to go on was a stag with "wide" antlers. **Still, it gave us some confidence going ahead.**

After a great night's sleep, we were up and keen to go. I love sleeping in my nice cosy sleeping bag and tent with a stream nearby murmuring away. The plan hatched over tea the night before was that Andrew would hunt the lower bush country that traditionally holds stags, while I would climb the peak into the alpine country. Sadly, silence was all I had for the first two hours. Andrew and I touched base on the radios while I sat on a rock with an overview of a large piece of real estate. He was onto a couple of low groaners but nothing appeared overly excited.

The weather was clear, with clouds and rain forecast later in the day. I looked up at the top of the peak and decided, "Why not?" - it was a nice day, and you never know what you will see. I got myself

together and headed off to conquer the top, which I had only done once before. Slowly climbing, I glassed over some great country with little luck.

A solitary hind was seen on a faraway slip and the only groan was from directly behind me about where we had camped.

Onwards and upwards I headed, the views simply stunning as I headed over the top ridge and opened up brand new country on the other side of the peak. Frustratingly, there were still no animals to be seen or heard. The watch neared midday and the belly started to demand attention after the rigorous exercise, so picking a nice, sheltered spot with views all the way towards the southern coast, I sat down to my traditional hunting lunch of wraps with the Te Anau Butchers amazing Texas Chilli and Cheese venison sausages.

I was enjoying the view and wraps when a low groan was heard across to the east. A brief look showed very steep cliff faces covered in bush, with only very nasty possible routes to get closer. I gave my best impression of a love-sick teenage stag, which, luckily enough is the best roar I actually have, and went back to my neglected meal, hoping the stag was keener on climbing down cliffs than I was



Same location, but a different day, with the new hunting companion, Katniss

going up them.

When another groan came back from the stag, I looked directly below me where a hind had appeared and was feeding away only 50 metres away in the scrub. The wind was right, and I was well hidden, so she continued to eat her lunch as I gave another attempt at the call of a defeated and lonely small stag. Back to my lunch as the hind had hers, the stag went again,



Dwight stoked to have the stag down

this time with a much angrier reply, and he had moved as the roar was "hollow" and bounced around so he was definitely in amongst cliffs.

I had only managed a few bites of my lunch while watching the hind, but I was determined to fix my belly first and then plan an attack on the stag. I finished my latest mouthful and gave another groan, and as my wrap made the journey to my mouth, I was confronted by a much clearer roar. I looked across, and around 500 metres away on an open ridge, I could clearly see



Heading back across the tops

a large stag. A look through the binos showed great length and strength of antler, a groan back and he was on his way dropping into the bush.

My wrap was quickly discarded despite my protesting stomach, and I got myself organised. The bush edge retreated about 250 meters from me and, with another couple of roars from the approaching stag, I fixed my gaze on the edge. The stag magically appeared, stepped out into the scrub and looked around intently, looking for the pathetic interloper in his territory. As he searched I had a great look at him; he had a huge body and looked to have some age, and his antlers had good length with dark colour and bright white tips. The only downside was that he was missing the royal on both sides. Sadly, I had struck a few stags in this area that simply seem to be missing the full set up top. I made the decision that he was an older boy and thought about a shot, and although the angle was bad and the scrub in the way, perhaps as he had run this far for a fight, he might just keep coming. I still

had the hind; she was below me, showing complete disregard for the noisy silly males posturing for her attention.

A low groan from me gave the stag a direction to focus on and he immediately headed my way, disappearing out of view behind a steep little ridge just over 100 metres away. I got down and ready with my Sako Finnlight 7mm-08, lying across my pack waiting, and thinking to myself how I was now squishing my lunch with my body weight.

Time seemed to stand still - the big boy gave a couple of roars out of view as I focused on the ridge, hoping he would appear on a nice open section to give me a solid shot, when bingo! Antlers appeared behind the ridge top, twisting and turning as the stag looked around for his rival. It was freaking awesome to simply wait in anticipation as this magnificent beast worked himself up.

He finally stepped up onto the ridge about 120 metres away, giving me a completely clear side-on view. He

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Savouring the moment back at camp

stopped and searched for his adversary. I double checked he was as big and old as I had thought and prepared to shoot. He lowered his head and gave a long roar, at the same time 'marking' his territory by urinating everywhere. As his roar finished, I squeezed off and was rewarded with a solid "thwack" from my 140 grain Accubond. He immediately dropped and rolled out of view off the back of the ridge.

Wow, what a buzz! From a quiet day sitting contemplating the complexities of life to a full - on roaring stag charging in from hundreds of metres away across scrubby tops. It's what you dream off for 11 months of the year, waiting for the roar.

Packing up I headed over, which was easier said than done, as the country was very steep and scrubby. As I got closer the smell of rutting stag was overpowering, and there he was, a further 30 to 40 metres downhill.

He was huge in body. Until you shoot a true older stag you simply don't realize how big they get. The first shot was true, straight through the front shoulders.

I stood back and simply admired him, a massive, majestic beast, albeit a touch smelly, but that simply added to the awe and power of a rutting stag. Pulling his head out of the scrub, I was rewarded with the view of his great antlers, 36-inch length with 10 points. So close to the perfect 12, but a trophy regardless, destined for my wall to remind me of the hunt every time I look at him. Such an amazing beast deserves the respect it had earned as the master of the mountain.

I savoured the moment and sat down to finally enjoy the squashed remnants of my lunch before the task of butchering all the meat I could carry. I have no idea how the hunters of old carried out whole stags to sell!

I had more than 40 kilograms on board, and as a competitive runner, I would be considered fit, but I was having to fight to get back up the hill to the top. I had all day, so took my time as I finally hit the tops and started the long descent back to camp, giving Andrew the great news once I had line of sight for the radio.

A few hours later, I hit camp feeling a bit jaded. The night before, Andrew had asked me "what's the plan for tomorrow?" I remember I had replied "to shoot a big stag each and to place the heads against a tree at each end of our fly so we could enjoy the view while we ate dinner." I took great pleasure in placing my head against my tree and then sitting back and admiring it as I enjoyed a cuppa.

Andrew returned with no luck and very little heard, but he was as excited about the stag as I was and more gutted he wasn't there to see it all unfold.

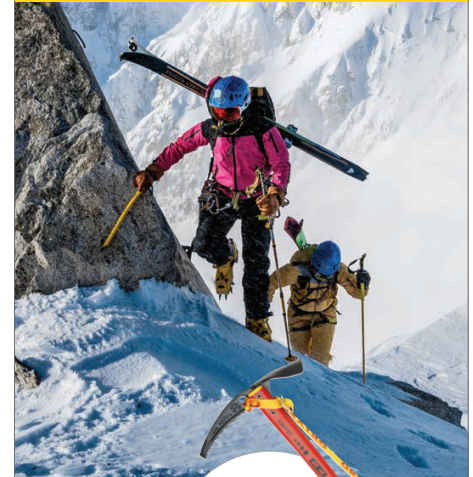
The morning had us waking to rain on the tents; it was meant to clear, but we could only sit under the fly and drink so many cuppas before giving up and heading out.

Despite the lack of roaring, all it takes is one animal to make the hunt a memorable one, and I can still see that stag away on the far ridge, the bush edge and the top of the ridge as he challenged all.

And in a great extra bonus I will remember him yet again as I munch the Texas Chilli and Cheese sausages he helped make on my next hunt, hopefully not squashed this time.



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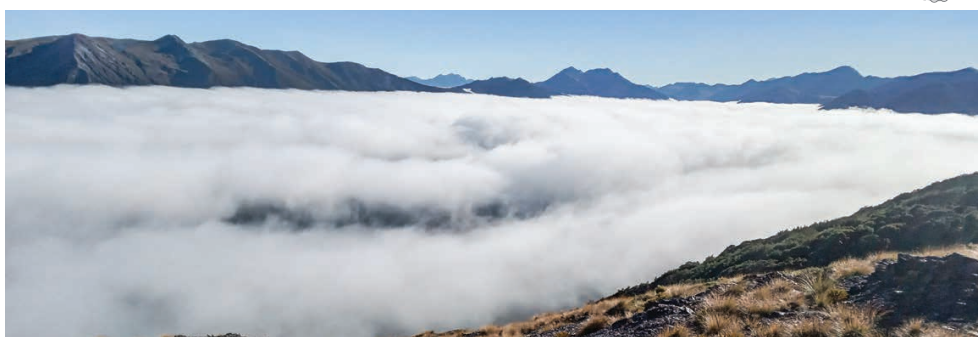


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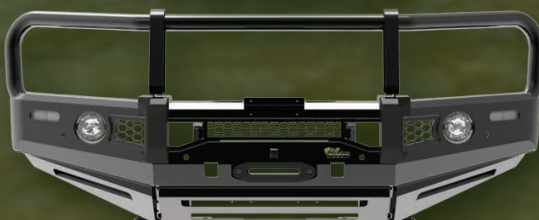
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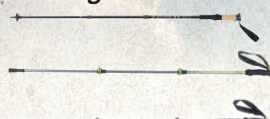
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WRITTEN BY
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PIECING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

The hind was utilising the now-broken canopy that was letting in more warmth

Bowhunting in the bush is like one of those huge puzzles that takes the entire week to assemble

If you can see it, the pieces slowly come together. For me, it's extremely satisfying picking up the bow and attempting to out-craft a deer in its own living room.

I hadn't really had a good sneak around in the bush since the roar. And to be honest, the roar is very different to a cold, winter's day sneaking about the place. Things slow down a lot and there is not a lot of movement, so sometimes you must look for the finer details to get the results. I will take you on a little bush hunt I did recently and hopefully share some knowledge as the yarn unfolds.

I knew the area pretty well so even though I hadn't been there for a few months, I made an educated guess on where to start looking. **The door closed on the truck shortly after daybreak and it was time to wander along an old track, through the pine forest and up into the native.** Deer would be living in both areas, but I felt like the native might provide me with some daytime feeding activity close to their

bedding areas. Only time would tell. The day was dead calm – too calm almost. I needed to hear them before they heard me, but in these conditions, that was going to be difficult.

Choosing a well-used deer trail, I crept around the contours of the hillside. I could feel the cool morning air dropping down through the bush. When conditions are like this, it's like a game of snakes and ladders in the bush. Cutting around and then working up little spurs likely to hold deer, then sidling again. Once I start hitting deer beds, everything has to slow down but the plan remains the same. As the day warms up, the air begins to lift instead of falling - but if I've played my snakes and ladders right, I should be well into the high-to-mid hillside zone. This is where the deer usually like to bed for the day. By midday

I was coming across deer beds pretty regularly, but still no deer. The breeze that had been so good was now switching. I started cutting up a little more and at this point, had dropped my guard. CRASH, CRASH, gone. The first deer for the day. Not all is lost, I tell myself. This might be the preferred bedding height today.

First things first, I needed to have a break. It's far too easy to get out of the mental zone after a prolonged period of stalking. A break definitely helps bring me back, and with concentration returned, off I went. The area had become quite steep and had some less-than-ideal bush type to deal with. Floundering around for a bit, I had just managed to free myself when the thought, 'right, this looks good' came into my head. Then crash, BARK, crash! I was certainly now in the right area. I really needed to stay in this workable bush and just stalk. Back around I went, staying at this contour. **More beds but no deer, and by now, the sun had dropped over the ridge and the cooling air was dropping again.**

Time to drop, lose a bit of height and hit a slightly lower contouring deer trail. This plan involved hunting the bottom edge of their bedding, hopefully catching them



Taking a strategic break. My bow is always ready during a rest break, you never know what might walk along when you're not moving



Noticing the finer details is important when it comes to sign, right down to this well-balanced dropping!

starting to move down and around for the night. Before long I thought I could smell a deer. I could see fresh prints on the ground and evidence of browsing. I was standing, listening and looking for that flicker then BARK! She had been standing just out of sight watching me; it was checkmate. I was definitely losing the battle that day. Letting things settle down, I stayed on my well-used deer trail and kept contouring around. I would soon be running out of native, but still had some great little areas to work through. **The last few little gullies might provide.**

Sneaking, listening and then movement, yes! Half the battle was won! I could hear animals feeding. With a lot of work to do yet, I started to sneak in. It was pretty thick and if everything was to go my way, the shot would probably be under 20 yards. There was an animal... Wait, what! A goat. Not the target species at all. Five different

about 80 yards. I continued sneaking along, but nothing came of it. I suspected I was playing catch-up.

The day was warming up quickly, so I gained a bit of height and began a new sidle. There was plenty of sign about, but no beds as yet. As I rounded the ridge, I could see a deer up and over on the next ridge. And then another. And another. The air was stuck between the up and down phase and at this point in time, it was dropping. The hinds milled around, almost looking like they were going to bed down. I was still some 100 yards away looking through some big pines. With a lot of work to do, I popped out of sight and climbed until I was roughly at their level, sneaking around the hill on full alert, I was ready to go. All of a sudden, the breeze was shifting. No sooner had I laid eyes on them than they were bolting away. The wind is a bow



Once you start finding fresh beds, deer are bound to be close by

hunter's worst enemy.

Thinking to myself that I was in the bedding zone, I needed to drop down slightly and start again. It wasn't too long before I bumped into the next lot. Again, busted. Scolding myself, I realised that I needed to slow down and sharpen up. If I was going to catch a bedded deer off guard, I needed to just slow it right down. I found a nice deer trail that was running along just above an old track that hadn't been used for about 20 years and now might serve as the perfect bedding bench. Sneaking along, I heard movement ahead of me. Arrow on, I slowly popped my head over the rise. Goats, but this time one of them is going to get it! **Slowly, I positioned myself to make the kill.** As an old billy fed into a three-quartering position at 20 yards, I settled the pin right on the soft spot at the back of the rib cage. The shot was gone and the billy barely made 20 yards. The two nannies in the mob with their kids just looked at him for a bit, then carried on with their day. I had to have a little laugh. It was as if they were thinking 'he was just a pain in the arse anyway!'

I needed to focus again and keep working my way through this contour line. There was an area of drilled and poisoned pines coming up. This now-open canopy often creates great bedding opportunities for deer. I was on the old bush track and poked my nose into the first of the dead-standing trees to see deer some 30-odd yards away - three of them. This was my chance! **One looked at me for a few moments, catching my movement the moment my head slowly popped up.** Staying very still, she lost interest, and I was able to slink back just out of sight. At this point, I slipped off my day bag to ensure it didn't catch on anything. I wanted to sneak down and close the distance a few more yards.



Picking well-used deer trails to stalk along helps reduce noise, plus they will lead you to where the deer may be



No sooner had I laid eyes on these deer than they were bolting away. The wind is a bow hunter's worst enemy

so I needed to shoot under. Just bending my knees a little was going to give me the wriggle room I required to finish the shot. I worked through the release until POP! The arrow was gone. The sound of broadhead carving through the chest gave me instant

little rise, the hind was still bedded but looking my way. She knew there was something going on just over the little rise. I had an arrow on and needed to roll the dice a little bit here. **Her kill zone was obscured by the exact rise I was using to hide behind.**

Edging forward with the bow upright and ready, I moved towards her, hoping to clear the shot opportunity. It became too much for her and she stood up in her bed. Perfect. I rolled the cams over, and as I settled into the shot, noticing that there was a chance I could hit a stick

feedback. This was venison in the pack for sure. Moving quietly, I picked up my gear and went to the scene. A lung blood-soaked arrow lay just beyond where she stood. Now it was just a matter of tracking her blood and prints around and down the hill. After 100 metres I found her, toes up.

It was great feeling putting all the sign together, working the airflow as the day came and went. **I definitely got schooled a few times but each time was another opportunity to learn, pick up the lip and keep trying.**



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BRITT DAVIES

ON ADVENTURE AND EMPOWERMENT

WRITTEN BY | HANNAH RAE



Learning from those I trust

Britt Davies embodies the spirit of adventure and empowerment

A passionate advocate for women in the outdoors and the female representative for the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, Britt's journey from North Island beach dweller and ocean lover to discovering a love for the vast wild places of the Southern Alps and Fiordland is equal parts inspiring and instructive.

I had the pleasure of meeting Britt on the Wāhine and Wapiti trip, a five-day wilderness expedition organised by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation earlier this year. Her story offers valuable insights and practical advice for anyone looking to embark on their own hunting adventures or pursue ambitious outdoor goals. Let's get to the highlights of our conversation.

WHAT ROLE DID THE OUTDOORS PLAY IN YOUR LIFE GROWING UP?

I was brought up in Tauranga, on the ocean, we weren't really mountain people at all. We'd go camping but not really hiking. I grew up surfing and fishing and hanging out in the boat. My grandad, two uncles and my dad are all commercial fishermen, and mum ended up working in the fishing industry too.

We grew up duck shooting through Mum's side of the family and we had access to a pond on a farm near Te Awamutu. It was just a little pond with a little maimai and we'd made another maimai up on top of the hill. The best year I had there was shooting with my Poppa and my family. I just love duck shooting - because it's always been a family tradition, bringing everyone together and all hanging out, and it's not Christmas Day.

I got my firearms license at 18. It was empowering being able to get out there and do it for myself.



My first stag, a beautiful Red I shot with my ex-partner Josh during the roar of 2023



Anna and I pushing our boundaries in the Stillwater block this year

HOW DID YOU GO FROM OCEAN GAL AND DUCK SHOOTER TO BIG GAME MOUNTAIN HUNTING?

My first real big game stalk was with one of my now best friends, Tracey. We met through my partner at the time and she was a keen hunter who'd learned through her ex-partner and his friends. Soon after we met she entered us in the Ashburton hunting competition. I came away with a beautiful bull tahr, and Tracey came away with two nannies. It was my first experience of that style of hunting. Canterbury was amazing, beautiful and just so different. It had me hooked. You spend all day climbing mountains, and you're pretty buggered, and then you get something at the end of it. It was pure elation.

To top it off, I won the heaviest bull tahr for the females. And after seeing the entries in the male category - with the bigger and better prize pool - Tracey entered her nannies and won the heaviest nanny tahr for the males section.

From there it was a mixture of learning from different people who were very knowledgeable, just going out and doing it and saying yes to opportunities when they came up. There's also a difference between learning from people by listening, watching and them helping you, and then doing that by yourself. I would make sure to go on solo walks and hunts too, to put into practise what I'd been learning.

My most recent chapter of learning was with my ex-partner Josh. He taught me even more and developed my skills so much further. I'm very lucky to have had someone be so patient and willing to spend time teaching me, showing me, and answering my questions.

STARTING SOMETHING NEW CAN BE INTIMIDATING FOR ANYONE, BUT PARTICULARLY IF YOU'RE A FEMALE ENTERING A MALE-DOMINATED SPORT. HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THIS JOURNEY?

Mum had three brothers and she had this constant battle of them being allowed to do stuff that she wasn't allowed to do. So she had this real 'girls can do anything' perspective on

the world. She ingrained that message in my sister and I from a young age, and made sure we had exposure to all the typically blokey activities.

I definitely understand and have empathy for how intimidating it can be. But if we want to make change, if we want to go out there and actually do something, there's nothing stopping us. No one's telling us we can't do it. There's no rules against it.

We have the ability to make that change, we have the ability to go out and do it. Yeah it's intimidating but that's mostly a mindset, right? It's a mindset we've absorbed or had pushed onto us from social constructs. It's up to us to change that narrative.

It can be hard at first to find like-minded people when you're a novice hunter. It's the same with anything, like starting a business or moving to a new place - it's finding those connections and making friends. Hunting as a novice female is no different. It's a male-dominated sport, but there are so many females out there doing it, it's just about finding them.

To me, apart from carrying meat out, I don't see the difference in potential hunting skill levels between women and men. If you're a small woman (even if you're strong) you're still at a disadvantage when it comes to carrying a heavy load compared to a huge guy. But apart from that it should be a pretty even playing field.

FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO LEARN FROM?

Look for people you trust, who you feel safe with, who have the knowledge and who are willing to teach you.

They can be hard to find, but they're out there and it's worth finding them.

It's about networking, talking to people and connecting through organisations like NZDA, going to your local branch. When you walk in, potentially you're the only woman in the room, but you just show a bit of confidence and interest, and next minute you've made some mates with these guys so it's no different to any situation really.

There's also nothing like jumping in the deep end. And just being willing to go for a walk with people, to watch, listen, observe



Anna and I enduring the famous Fiordland rain



Our all-girls opening weekend hunt



Sister Ash in the family maimai

and absorb it all. Another great lesson from Mum is that you have to earn your right. I'd never give up my fishing spots to a random, right? So when I ask people if I can join them on a hunt, I'm mindful of that too. It's about establishing relationships and friendships, and earning their trust that you're not going to go and ransack their spot.

It's a balance between being confident enough in the first place to ask to tag along, and earning your right to even be there asking that question.

THERE'S A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT HUNTING, BUT IT TEACHES US A LOT TOO. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF THROUGH HUNTING SO FAR?

I've learnt that I'm always learning. It's also allowed me to push my own boundaries - or, more accurately, to find my boundaries and then push them. And building my self-trust and self-belief; knowing when to push and when to call it quits, when to back track, when to sit down and think about this properly. It's definitely given me more grit and more confidence because the ocean is my natural space and the mountains are a big new learning environment for me.

That was some advice I was given before going into Fiordland - know your boundaries and be safe, but don't be afraid to push your boundaries either. That's all part of the adventure!

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE HUNTING EXPERIENCE?

There's been a few! The 2023 roar with my ex-partner Josh when I shot my first beautiful Red stag, the Wapiti ballot 2024 where my friend Anna and I spent ten wet days in Stillwater for 4th period, and the Wāhine and Wapiti trip with the FWF in February 2024.

But one experience really stands out for me. In 2021 my family couldn't make duck shooting opening weekend so I decided to invite a bunch of my mates from Wānaka to join, many of them had never been hunting or shooting before.

There ended up being eleven of us all meeting at the Te Awamutu pond. It was a great opportunity for chicks to get into it and understand it, and it opened up some interesting conversations. For example, 'I eat meat from the supermarket but I can't handle the fact that we're killing ducks right now,' and having that experience prompt some deep thinking about where what we eat comes from.

Another one of my friends has a partner who hunts, but she'd never been out because she'd never been invited. So it was a cool opportunity for her to learn the basics of a shotgun, get comfortable in the maimai, and have a shot at some ducks when they came through.

I just loved it, it aligns with my whole philosophy of empowering women to do cool stuff!

HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE FIORDLAND WAPITI FOUNDATION AS THE FEMALE ADVOCATE? AND HOW HAS THIS INSPIRED YOUR FUTURE VISION?

I started last year by volunteering my graphic design and communications skills for the inaugural Winter Wapiti Weekend. I didn't really know anything about Wapiti but I'd been to Te Anau a few times, and thought 'Oh, I'll just help them out with this!' I helped them with social media and communications for the event. Unfortunately, I must have done too good of a job and they gave me more things to do beyond that weekend.

Then we started to share ideas on how to broaden the reach of the FWF and how we could reach more females, and this is where the Wāhine and Wapiti concept, a 5-day all-women trip in the Glaisnock area guided by Roy Sloan, was born. That evolved into becoming a female advocate to the committee.

It's a neat way to be involved and I'm very proud. I've been creating comms and sharing the Foundation story, social media, helping plan and execute the Wāhine and Wapiti trip in February 2024, and designing the booth for the recent NZDA conference. Plus any other crazy ideas we have or that Roy puts on my to-do list!

The Wāhine and Wapiti trip inspired me in terms of seeing what kind of links are missing still between hunting and conservation, and I'd like to bridge that gap some more. Doing things like that trip helps to educate both sides and bring them together, show that we're actually gunning (pun intended) for the same thing.

I'd love for there to be a summit for females in hunting, to connect and develop some camaraderie and relationships to then take away. The great thing about the FWF is that we have the vehicle to be able to do that and now it's just about connecting the dots.

*

A huge thanks to Britt for sharing her experiences and wisdom, and thanks for being an inspiration to seek genuine connection, push our personal comfort zones, and soak in the adventure.





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WRITTEN BY ~ DANIEL URQUHART

HUNTING THE TOPS WITH KIDS

As each of my children was born, the dream of one day hunting the tops with all my children grew stronger and stronger

Weather events had put paid to any previous attempts, but now everything aligned perfectly to allow me to finally stroll the tops safely with all my children.

It was a simple plan; extend a two-day adult hunt into a four-day child-friendly hunt. A good dollop of summer snow greeted us on arrival in the mountains, something that would provide substance and fun in the days to come. Packs on and a well-planned leading ridge would provide the access to our chosen hunting spot.

While the boys James (9) and Isaac (8) would definitely have their fun in the mountains it was my five-year-old daughter Madison-Rose who would set the pace and tone of the trip. A couple hundred metres into the first climb she explained that her legs were tired and simply couldn't walk up such big hills. The silence that greeted her let her understand that no such complaints were to be made again,

but we adjusted our pace to hers and allowed her the time to adapt to the mountain environment.

It was a pleasant stroll through the mountain beech that afternoon. Nearing the first camp, a fresh rubbing was examined by us all and yes, there was a stag nearby. Breaking out of the beech canopy, just beneath a clear ridge, an eight-point stag was caught exiting 80 metres in front of us. Reaching the ridge, we put down our packs and got ready for the

evening, glassing our first catchment. A young buck chamois sat safely at 200 metres, curious of his new friends, but no other animals were seen that night.

Waking in the morning, the kids asked where Ruckus, the family pet/pig dog, was. An unlucky pig must have strolled into camp and found himself stuck to Ruckus with his tracking gear turned off. The morning proved fruitful with a big barren hind, our pet chamois buck and a handful of young deer seen. But it was the slightly apricot-coloured, old buck chamois spotted high on our intended route that got Isaac most excited.

Camp packed, Ruckus eventually returned with a very proud, chuffed



Madison-Rose trying to convince Ruckus to give her a ride



Isaac heading out into the golden hour



Madison-Rose taking her turn leading the way



Isaac and Madison-Rose above the tussock

demeanour that spoke volumes about how happy he was with his successful morning solo hunt. We closed the distance on the chamois, which was now out of sight. A couple hundred metres from the bucks last sighting, a slightly agitated eight-point stag stood perfectly motionless at 125 metres. I asked James if he wanted to shoot it. He refused and simply said *'No Dad, I want a big boy'*.

The chamois buck quietly fed away and then somehow disappeared off the face of the earth, as they so often do. We had our lunch and replenished our water supplies with the still-present snow drifts. It was a good feeling—we had officially made it above the bush line.

One last push had us with camp two set up. We had a pleasant midafternoon hunt, at the same time exploring the new territory for an evening hunt. Rested, rehydrated, and refuelled, we set off in high hopes of finding a big boy for James. I explained that when you camp amongst the animals, they can be anywhere, so we must focus and remain silent. That lasted just a couple of minutes, and we

were soon laughing, joking, smiling and enjoying each other's company under perfect weather conditions. Murphy's law prevailed and there was James's big boy, standing up and looking at the noise 300 metres from camp. **I was left dumbfounded, James was holding back the tears, and Isaac and Madison-Rose stood in silence.**

The big boy was gone as soon as we laid eyes on him.

Retiring early that evening we set the alarm for 5:30 am, confident he had only seen and most definitely heard us, but hadn't scented us, so maybe he hadn't gone far. We downed our breakfast and set off as soon as there was enough shooting light. The plan was simple; do a wide arching dog leg, searching all the country where the stag may have gone, then finish back at

The Urquhart's first mountaintop



his original sighting place.

Not far from camp another eight-point stag presented a perfect opportunity for James to secure his first stag, but once again he said *'I want a big boy, Dad.'* We shook hands on the decision, with me explaining that the big boy may not be seen and we may go home empty handed. He took ownership of his decision and the search continued, but not for long. No more than ten minutes had passed, and there he was, back turned to us, head down grazing



James with his big boy at last



Every boy's dream, strolling along the tops with a big stag



Urquharts on top of the world

a hundred metres away and just off the ridge we were travelling.

We snake slithered on our bellies through the mountain tussocks into a shooting position. With my hand-held firm on the rifle butt to absorb the kick, James lined up his Big Boy and waited for him to turn broadside. With all the confidence of a 9-year-old boy releasing his long-held dream, he squeezed off his handloaded round into the stag's boiler room. **The stag staggered and swayed at the shot and stood on weak legs.** James put another round into him, which finalised his dream into reality.

The jubilation, joy and love a father receives from his son in such moments is something very unique in its nature. Maybe a certain TV show captures it best. Time seems to stand still as the handshakes, hugs and yahoos reverberate around the mountains that produce the experience. While photos capture the moment, your soul preserves it.

It was one hell of a happy camp getting packed up later that morning. With goal one for the trip accomplished, we then set our sights on goal two. Climb our first mountains together as a family, and maybe pick up a buck chamois for Isaac. With packs on and a forced hydration at the last known water source we set forth with water bottles filled. Four mountain tops felt our presence that afternoon with the last and highest at 1750 metres setting the scene for an epic photo shoot.

We camped high just under the last mountain top at 1700 metres that night. Feasted on rice risotto, big boy eye fillets and dessert (picking chocolate and dried fruit from a handmade breakfast mix). As the sun was about to have its last thoughts for the day we sat together watching it. We thanked the weather and hunting gods for the favourable hand they had dealt us, and then sat in complete silence as the final rays disappeared over the horizon.

Today was a good day.



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A beginner's guide to pig hunting



**Better
Hunting**
Aotearoa

Better Hunting is a free online training platform built by the Game Animal Council to help hunters upskill and hunt safely and successfully

The programme is also intended to provide a pathway and support hunters going on to do practical training, such as through NZDA's HUNTS courses.

The platform has tonnes of content all designed by New Zealand hunters for New Zealand hunters. You can do it on your phone and even download the courses for offline viewing using the app.

For new, inexperienced and casual hunters, the two main courses, Hunting Essentials and Firearm Essentials, cover basic hunting and outdoor skills. More experienced hunters will still find useful information throughout many of the modules, in the maps, forecasts, hunting and ballot calendars, intentions form or games. Each module has a short quiz and there are assessments you can do to ensure your knowledge is up to date.

Visit our website to check it out. If you enjoy using it, please share it around.

BETTERHUNTING.NZ

New Zealand's pig hunters are a valued and unique part of the hunting sector

There is a huge amount of preparation and work that goes into pig hunting, above and beyond what's required with other game animal hunting. For those without an 'in', even dabbling or learning what's involved in pig hunting can seem like an insurmountable challenge.

To help, the Game Animal Council have worked closely with the NZ Pig Hunting Association to build and launch an introduction to pig hunting course on Better Hunting. The course is online, and pig hunting really is something that must be 'done to learn' but you can get much more from time with your mentors after learning some theory first.

Even if you're not actively looking to hunt pigs, a quick look over the course may be

of interest. Understanding the mechanics of pig hunting can prove valuable when you encounter pigs and pig hunters on the hill, and an appreciation of other hunting styles never goes amiss.

The new pig hunting course on Better Hunting addresses key topics for pig hunters including ethics, animal welfare, dog training, working with landholders, personal safety, firearms selection, responsibilities and obligations.

So, what's in the course? Here's some main areas of focus you can explore.

THE PEOPLE SIDE OF THINGS

As hunters, we all have responsibilities and things we need

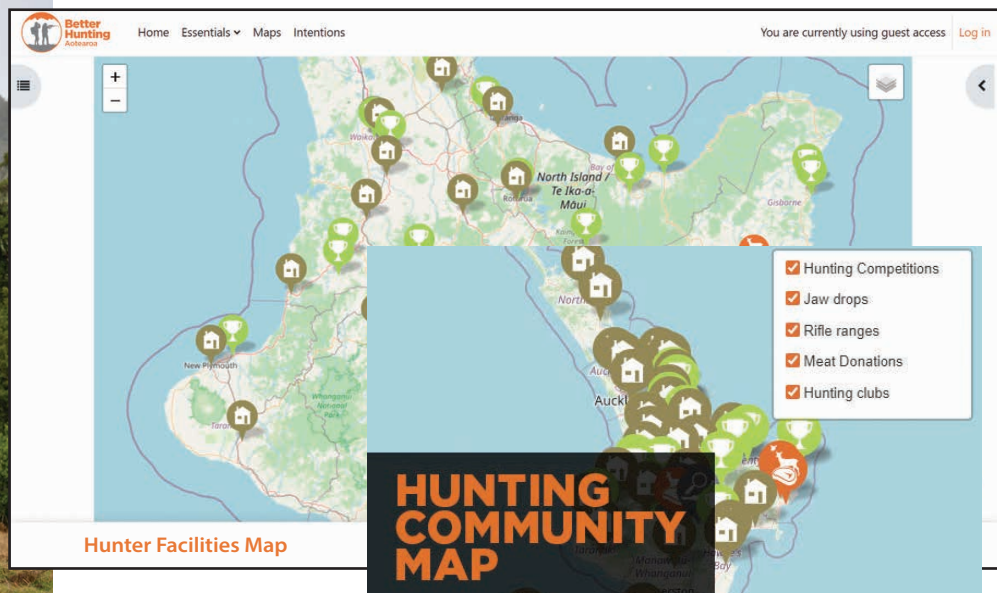
to consider, and these are different depending on what type of hunting you're doing. Some key responsibilities and considerations for pig hunting include:

1. Social License

Pig hunting is an important activity for game animal management and every pig hunter's behaviour impacts the perception of pig hunting. It's important that collectively, we hold each other accountable in achieving best practice standards when pig hunting.

The course explores how social license is not only about operating under best practice hunting yourself, but also influencing others to do the same.

If you enjoy pig hunting, it's important you say so and do what you can to make



Improving land access and hunting opportunities for pig hunters relies on the whole sector self-managing to ensure and improve the positive perception of pig hunting.

3. Pig Welfare

Dogs make pig hunting unique in that once they've found a pig, it's all go! When a dog is bailing a pig, you need to be fit enough to reach them and dispatch the pig as quickly as possible.

There is legislation in place that sets out rules around treating wild animals, including when you're hunting them. Be careful and safe but be quick about things.

Using a knife versus a gun means you'll be dispatching the pig differently. The pig hunting course will teach you how to ensure a quick finish when your dogs are bailing.

THE PIGS

Pigs have unique biology and behaviours compared to other game animals, which provides different hunting opportunities you won't find hunting other game.

Pigs get around! They can be found in all sorts of landscapes and could be a candidate for New Zealand's most unique game animal. They'll eat most things, and their sign is a dead giveaway to where they've been. And they're smart (especially the big old boars). Knowing how they operate, and the seasonal changes to their behaviour can help you be more successful when hunting them. For example, pigs can't sweat. In summer, they'll find places to keep cool.

Scent is a critical part of hunting pigs, especially when you have dogs. It's important to be mindful of your own

scent, but also how your dogs might scent a pig nearby.

Big old pigs can be found anywhere – be mindful of your footing when carrying them out. It's not worth injuring yourself after a successful hunt!

THE DOGS

Pig dogs play a crucial role in pig hunting – through finding, bailing, stopping and holding a pig.

It's up to you to minimise the risk to your dog as much as possible and as mentioned, there is legislation that sets out your responsibilities as an owner both to keep your dog safe, and to keep others safe around your dog.

Your dog's behaviour is your liability. It's important to have well-trained, well-behaved and respectful dogs. It's a dog's nature to behave differently when out in the hills, so doing the work to train your dog before heading out is important.

Among other things, the course talks about some of the different breeds of dogs commonly used for pig hunting and how tracking collars can be useful (finding your dogs quickly means you're more likely to get the pig!).

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

All the preparation, training, land access planning, and dog handling can seem a bit overwhelming – how does it all come together? The course finishes by stepping through a theoretical hunt - from planning to execution – where two hunters head out on a hunt with different levels of pig hunting experience. They take a dog with them.

Walk through the hunt to see how they hunt following the best practice guidelines in the course. Help them prepare, find a place to hunt, understand

the activity of pig hunting a net positive for your community.

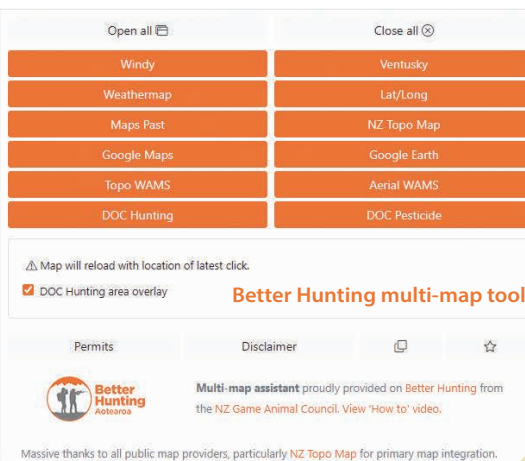
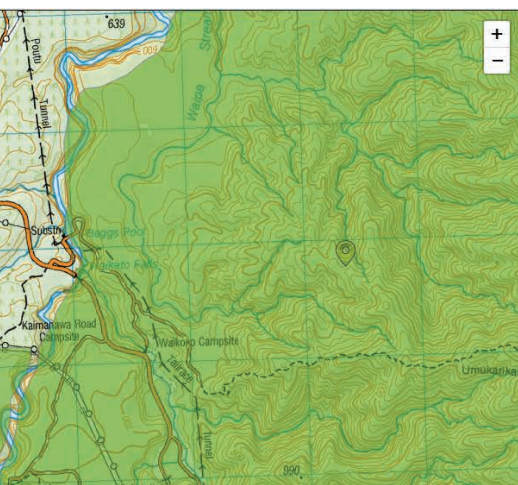
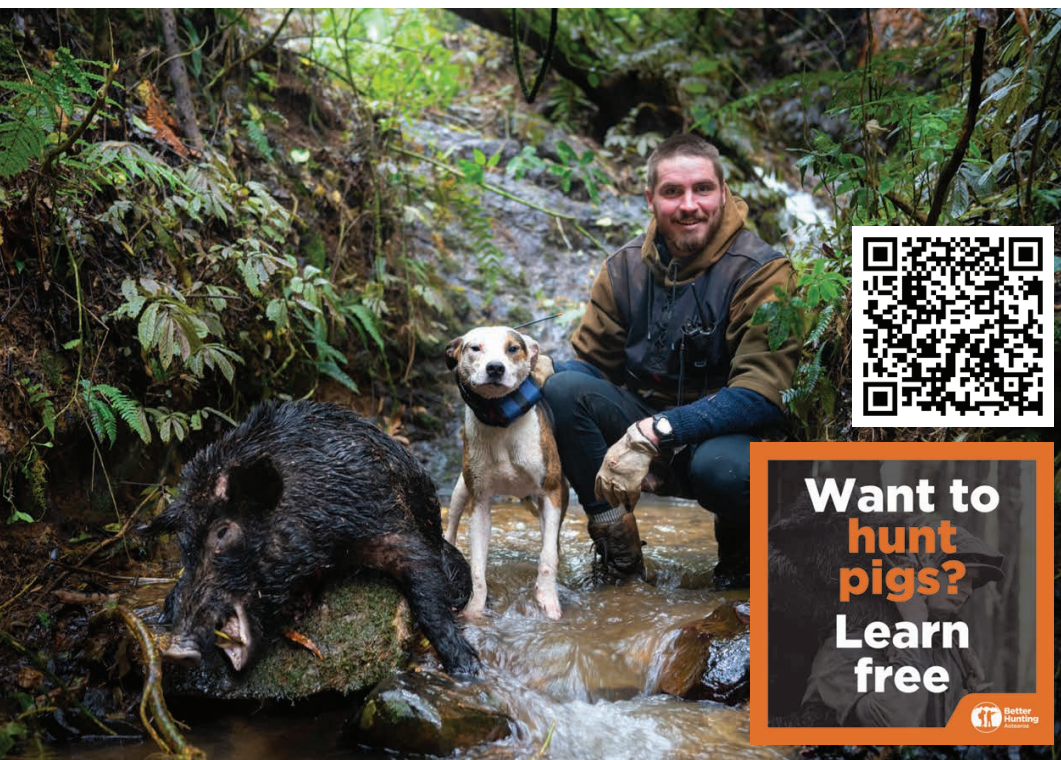
Consider joining a pig hunting club – this can show that you're sticking around, responsible and accountable when you're looking for access to private land.

2. Land Access

A lot of pig hunting takes place on private land, requiring the permission and approval of the landholder. When you're out, you need to make sure you stay within the boundaries of where you've been given access.

If you're using dogs, they don't care about property boundaries, so before setting out consider getting neighbouring landholder contacts and permission to recover dogs if they go beyond the boundaries of the property you're hunting.

If you're pig hunting on public conservation land, a permit is needed and there might be conditions on things like number of dogs permitted or dog training requirements.



access and permissions, and then undertake the hunt itself (spoiler alert – they get a pig).

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The pig hunting course will help you pick up the 'minimum standard of knowledge', so you can spend more time studying the practical stuff with your mentors (like how they handle their dogs).

We strongly recommend you get started on the practical stuff by joining a local club and/or tagging along with an experienced pig hunter. Clubs provide a lot of information, advice, community, and some are provided club-only hunting access to private forestry blocks and similar.

If you're curious about pig hunting, check out the course at betterhunting.nz

See local pig hunting clubs at nzpighunting.org.nz/clubs

WHAT ELSE IS NEW ON BETTER HUNTING?

New hunter facilities and community initiatives

The hunter facilities and community initiatives map originated in answering the common 'where can I sight in my rifle' question but evolved into something that can help hunters find heaps of other helpful information.

Using the map, you can quickly find regional:

- **Meat donation activities and drop-off points** - if you love hunting but have a full freezer then getting involved in one of these initiatives is a great way to keep hunting, manage game recreationally and feed your local community.
- **Jaw drop locations** - if you hunt

in an area that's currently doing scientific monitoring on game health, why not drop your jaw off and contribute to these citizen science initiatives.

- **Competitions** - hunt the width and breadth of New Zealand, taking part in hunting competitions.

- **Clubs** - we are lucky in New Zealand to have lots of active community-led hunting clubs. Look up your local on the map and get involved.

- **Ranges** - find places to sight-in your firearms safely, no matter where you are.

An added benefit of creating this map has been a simple nationwide snapshot of the volume and breadth of positive hunter work and economic activity around the country – something which often goes unnoticed and under-reported.

Like a directory, it will never be 'complete' and we know there are plenty of gaps, so please help us improve it by requesting updates to current information, or additions of those we've missed.

To see the map, go to www.betterhunting.nz or scan the QR code:

New multi-map assistant - hunt planning tool

We've added a multi-map tool to Better Hunting. It's fairly simple under the hood, but the time saving potential for you is massive.

When you click on the map, the multi-map tool creates links to that specific location on a number of useful hunting-related maps.

- **Curious about the vegetation of a location? Check out the zoomed in aerial imagery of that spot on the WAMS Property map.**
- **Want to check the DOC pesticide summary map for that location? Just click on through.**
- **What's the wind doing? Check the precise spot on Windy.**

You can use the map on mobile and you don't need a Better Hunting account; just bookmark it and you can use it anywhere.

Just click 'multi-map' or 'Maps' on betterhunting.nz – you can't miss it.






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GLEN THURSTON | MENTALHUNTS
KENDRA HILL | TE TARI PŪREKE – FIREARMS SAFETY AUTHORITY

Lived experience informing new mental health resource for the hunting community

Glen Thurston and Sam Manson are working to break down mental health barriers within the hunting community with their new online platform.

Their brainchild is Mental Hunts, a new YouTube hunting channel dedicated to breaking down the stigma around mental health in our firearms community.

On this channel they want to open the discussion about mental health and provide education and resources for their community.

The topic of mental health hits close to home for Glen, who openly says he has battled with his mental health his whole life.

In October 2019, Glen found himself struggling and one of the outcomes after reaching out for help, was his firearms licence being revoked. As both a keen hunter and needing firearms for work, losing his firearms licence felt like a real setback.

He has since regained his full firearms licence but after going through this experience he realised there is a real fear in the firearms community from others who may end up in a similar situation.

"Through this journey, one of the first things we wanted to do was remove the fear for firearms licence holders that seeing a health professional means you'll lose your firearms licence," says Glen.

To him, it makes no sense that by seeking help that a firearms licence holder could lose their ability to go out and do something which is good for their mental health.

These are the types of tough issues and questions that Mental Hunts wants to tackle. Alongside Glen are Sam Manson and Ned Brannigan. Sam is an experienced hunting guide who brings loads of hunting experience and shares this knowledge on their episodes. Ned is behind the camera and responsible for showing you the depths of the country the team spends time in.

Together they want to share all the great things about hunting and being in the outdoors, but also get to the bottom of the things licence holders want to know.

For the launch episode of Mental Hunts, Glen and Sam took Kendra Hill and Mike McIlraith from Te Tari Pūreke – Firearms Safety Authority on a trip to Dingleburn Station.

Glen shares his personal story with the pair from New Zealand's new firearms regulator and asks them what firearms licence holders can expect now that the Firearms Safety Authority is in place.

Together the crew from Mental Hunts and the Firearms Safety Authority talk candidly through the options available for firearms licence holders who might need to take a break from accessing their firearms – be that for their own wellbeing, or the safety of those around them, like family and neighbours.



Kendra with her first deer, on Dingleburn Station

A big part of the conversation is about being proactive, and not waiting for a situation to become desperate:

"A really important point is that mental health conditions are common. Our key message is for people to always seek help from a health professional. Don't use your firearms licence as an excuse not to seek help," says Kendra, a Senior Partnerships Advisor with Te Tari Pūreke.

"If you are struggling, firearms licence holders – and those around them – can be proactive, there are some practical steps you can take."

"Focus on getting professional help. The sooner you reach out for help, the better chance you're able to manage your health condition."

"If you are struggling or need a break from having access to firearms, licence holders can surrender their licence. This means you need to give your firearms to another licence holder for safe keeping, then let Te Tari Pūreke know you would like to surrender your licence. You don't need to give us a reason why."

"The benefits to this are you can still use firearms under the supervision of a firearms licence holder. You can continue to go on hunting trips with friends. And when you're ready, you can come back to us, provide information about the treatment or management of your condition, and apply for your firearms licence."

"For licence holders who haven't been proactive, interventions may be taken in the interest of their safety and the safety of those around them. But what we want to emphasise is less than 1% of licence holders find themselves temporarily suspended with possible revocation. And only a small portion of that 1% is for health concerns."

"I encourage you to watch the episode with MentalHunts where we dive into this with Glen and Sam."

While they were at Dingleburn Station, the Mental Hunts team wanted to show the Te Tari Pūreke team what hunting



Glen and Sam having a discussion with Kendra and Mike (from Te Tari Pūreke, the Firearms Safety Authority) for their podcast

is all about and the benefits of being in the outdoors, hunting and food gathering. With the interview part of the project out of the way they were able to head out and get Kendra her first deer.

You can find the episodes with Te Tari Pūreke and other relevant resources on www.mentalhunts.co.nz and follow them on Instagram to see more of their content.

For more information about responding to the health and wellbeing of firearms licence holders, people can also visit www.firearmssafetauthority.govt.nz – typing 'health' into the search tool on the homepage.





Every journey with a firearm starts with three steps

1

Unloaded

When travelling by road, you must always travel with an unloaded firearm. So check your firearms are unloaded before you head away.

Store ammunition separately and securely to your firearms during the journey.

2

Locked

Always carry your firearm in a locked case, or fit a trigger lock, or make it inoperable by removing a vital part like the bolt.

Your ammunition – stored separately – also needs to be in a locked container if possible.

3

Out of sight

Keep your firearms and ammunition out of view. Think about packing them first and then covering them with other bags or belongings.

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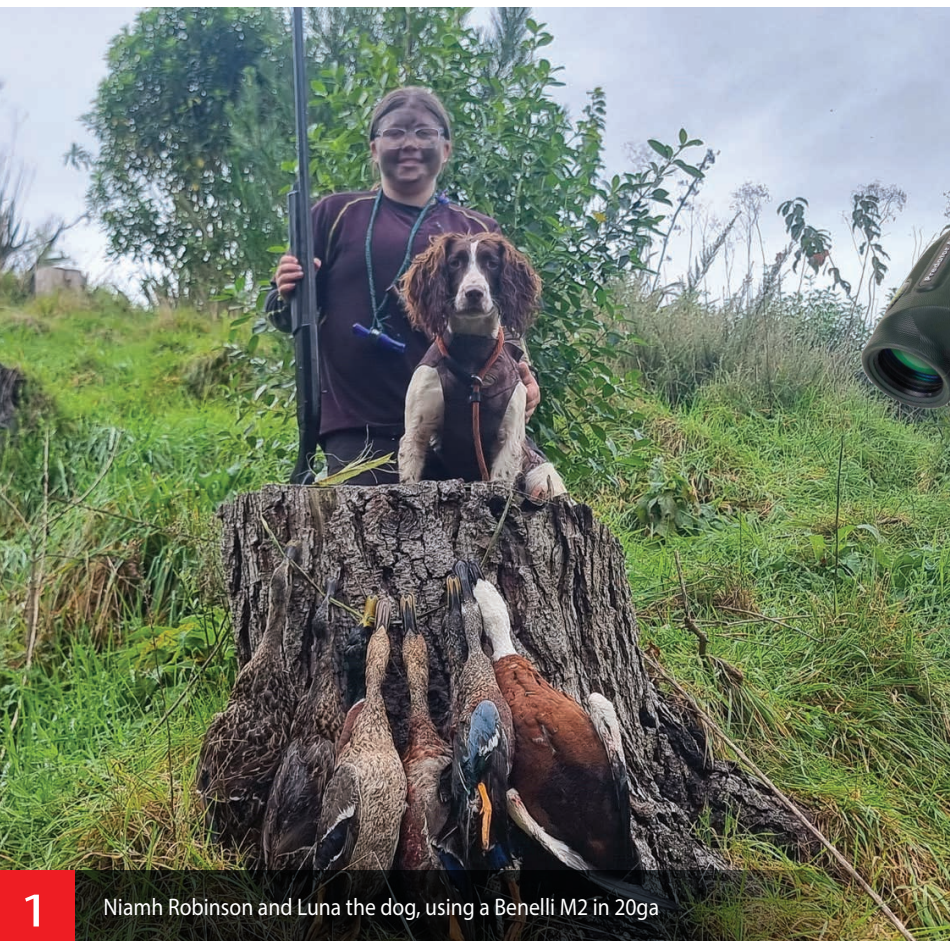


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WINNER



1

Niamh Robinson and Luna the dog, using a Benelli M2 in 20ga



2

Abby Peddie on her first deer hunt with the kids, shooting this yummy yearling Fallow with the suppressed Tikka 308

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Firearm used must be shown in photo



3

Matthew (15) with his first deer, a Fallow yearling using a shortened 308 Tikka

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Jessa Black with her first (of many) deer, using a .223 at 190m. She will be the hunter of the family, she is mad on it!

4



5

Zoe Robinson (13) with her first Billy, shot in Piopio with Dad's Benelli Lupo 6.5 Creedmoor



7

Isla Peddie (14) with her first ever Fallow, taken with a suppressed Tikka 308



Millie-Anne (14) with her first buck, 18 points, shot in Whanganui with her Papa

6

GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL NEWS

WRITTEN BY
TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER



Looking back to move forward

The NZ Game Animal Council recently turned 10 which has prompted some reflection. During the five years I've been with the GAC, I've had the great fortune of being able to work with some incredible leaders within the hunting sector

So, I thought for this column I'd talk about some of the things in my life that have shaped me as a hunter and some of the changes I've noticed in the hunting sector over the last 5-10 years.

Hunting and being outdoors has always been a big part of my life. I have been lucky to be immersed in hunting my whole life, right from a young age. At 14 I shot my first deer. At 16 I got my firearms license.

As a teenager I recall coming home from a week in the bush and laying a ground mat on the bedroom floor where I slept for the next week or so. **All I wanted was to be back out in the bush, in the tent.**

When you're out hunting, you're constantly learning. It's not about taking an animal every time you head out, but exploring the environment, spending time with friends and family, understanding the way nature operates and learning the habits of the animals.

Since 'growing up' I have worked in a

range of roles across the sector both in New Zealand and overseas - retail, guiding, pest control and now at the Game Animal Council. We are lucky here in New Zealand that we have such a wide range of year-round hunting opportunities and incredible landscapes with few of the restrictions common overseas - but this does come at a cost.

Without formal management, the value of these species isn't recognised. Management aids data collection, which then informs action. If you can't measure it, you can't monitor it and you can't show the value that these animals provide to the sector, the economy and the country. It would be wise and prudent to recognise that we must have more structured management programmes in New Zealand, that align with what works for New Zealand hunters but also supports conservation goals.

The growth of the hunting sector has been massive. We have some of the best hunting in the world and it's been great to see investment, coordination, and strategy increase over the years. With this growth, there's now more paid professionals in the sector than ever before, which has had a flow on effect - hunters are now providing a leading role in solutions to management.

This growth will continue to evolve the hunting sector and help shape relationships with other sectors too. I think collectively, we all recognise that no one is better placed than us to look after hunting and preserve it for future generations. We need to continue building the sector, raising awareness of the value of hunting and game animals and getting behind groups doing great work in this space already.

We've also become more united and engaged as a sector. Partially due to social media - sharing information, stories and pictures - but also in terms of understanding and respecting the different groups and opinions within the sector. We're a varied bunch of people but this united front will serve us well as we advocate for a sustainable future for hunting.

The increase in female hunters has also been awesome to see. Hunting is traditionally thought of as a male-dominated sport, but we've seen some key female icons in the hunting sector become more engaged and involved. This is such a powerful and positive

With my dad Alex. We still manage to get out on the hill together a couple of times a year





The Gale kids glassing for Dad. Hunting has changed for me over the years, but I still get the same feeling of gratitude each time I'm out

movement for female hunters getting out there, for themselves and for their families.

The management of game animals has been, for a long time, in a reactive space. With more groups being established that are focused solely on species management – the likes of the Sika Foundation, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, the Tahr Foundation etc. – this is moving game animal management into a more proactive space. These groups are recognising that we need to look after these herds and manage their impact, because no one else is here to do it.

These groups have also influenced a positive shift in how community-led initiatives work with government to get good gains. For example, the

Tahr Foundation's targeted harvest programme sees them working closely with the Department of Conservation (DOC), the Sika Foundation's work with the Ministry for Primary Industries as part of their wild game meat donation programme, and the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's work over the last 20 or so years with DOC.

My experience with hunting has changed over time, but I always still feel the same level of gratitude for the opportunities and experiences that are available for hunters in New Zealand. There are also still many frustrations! It's this feeling that drives me to do more for the hunting sector, to preserve and protect what makes hunting in New Zealand so unique.

My kids are now at the age where I can share these experiences with them. Duck shooting, hunting, taking them into the bush. Seeing the excitement and joy they get out of being in the outdoors gives me that same sense of gratitude and inspires me to keep pushing for positive change for the sector.

I'm proud to have played, and hopefully continue to play, a small role in the positive change we've seen in the hunting sector over the last few years. I'm thankful to be able to advocate for hunters and the management of game animals, show others the value that we as a sector can add, and show how we can be part of the solution.

So, while we look towards an exciting future for hunting in New Zealand, I encourage you to connect with hunting sector groups in your local area, engage

with organisations representing the views of hunters and support the great work that is currently happening.

Together, we can tell the story of hunting and quality game animal management in New Zealand, show the value and strength we bring to conservation and management, and preserve hunting for years to come.

To find out more about what the Game Animal Council does you can visit www.nzgac.org.nz as well as the GAC's Facebook or Instagram.

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.

www.betterhunting.nz



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WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

SPECULATION CREEK

TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

All photos
Dylan Higginson

Sandwiched between the Wilburg Range and Speculation Range and draining into the mighty Wanganui River is the Speculation Creek landing site

I would hazard a guess that this creek probably got its name because of something to do with gold exploration, which is a common theme on the coast.

With a relatively high camp at 1300m above sea level and being a little open and exposed to wind from a few directions, it would be an interesting place to be when we get those classic May/June storms that really drop the temperature and get the tents flapping. And given the elevation, once we do get a couple of those storms through, I'd be packing the appropriate tools for snow travel.

With generally easy travel and hunting in all directions through the numerous guts and folds, and a heap of scrub to keep an eye on. As well plenty of higher country to explore in the directions of both the Wilburg and Adams Flat, there really is a huge amount of scope from this one landing site.

It appears from DOC's control maps

that this area didn't get that much attention in 2023, but in years previous, that it certainly did. Given some of the reports of lower nanny numbers we are hearing across the blocks, it's probably safe to say that this landing site won't be crawling with tahr. But with all that scrub country and the tahr having been harassed into living in the cover of the scrub and bush, there will certainly be more animals that you're not seeing. And that's particularly true for a site like this with all the scrubby creeks and gutters.

With plenty of what would be considered lower angle terrain for tahr hunting, Speculation Creek would be a good option for those new to tahr hunting or those who are a little less confident in the steeper stuff.



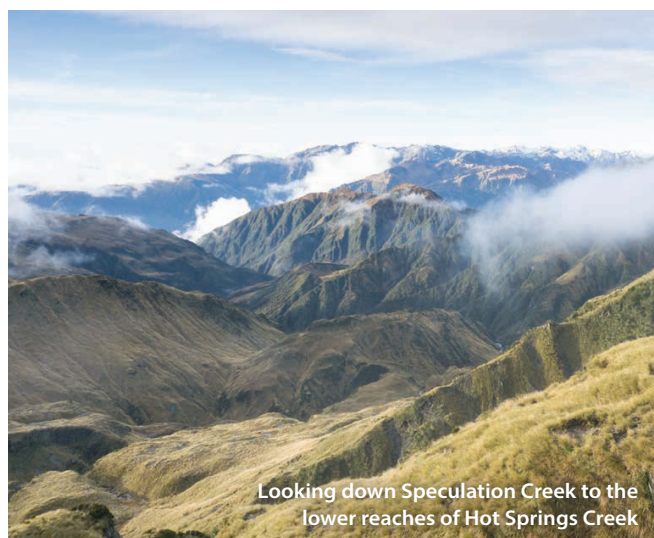
Camp on centre ridge



Looking up on to the Willberg Range



Looking westward across Speculation, Hot Spring and Cathedral Creeks



Looking down Speculation Creek to the lower reaches of Hot Springs Creek



Dylan Higgison high above the campsite on the Willberg Range

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TOP WAITAHU BIV

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Top Waitahu Hut
Nina Dickerhof

Here's one for the serious hut baggers. Remote and challenging to access on foot with no cut tracks or marked routes. Located in the head of the Waitahu Valley, a tributary of the Inangahua River, Top Waitahu Biv sits just on the bush-line at 1260m altitude

A large sign on the outer wall warns of a low avalanche risk. Unlikely as the biv hasn't been hit by anything of that nature since 1968 when it was built, and the possibility ever more remote as the climate warms.

Because of the difficult access, foot visits to the biv are averaging around two to three per year. There is the odd fly-in by chamois hunters but even with this, the eight visits logged in 2017 stood out as a record.

Top Waitahu Biv has been designated as minimal maintenance by the Department of Conservation but has had some recent work done on it and is in great condition. It is a two-bunk design and is unique in having a mini coal range snugly fitted into the corner that provides efficient cooking and heating. **Water is from a stream close by. There is no toilet.**

I visited Top Waitahu for the first time in May of this year with my partner Joke, and our friends Liz and Ian. I'd added the biv to the Remote Hut website way back when I set it up, but had never found the motivation to

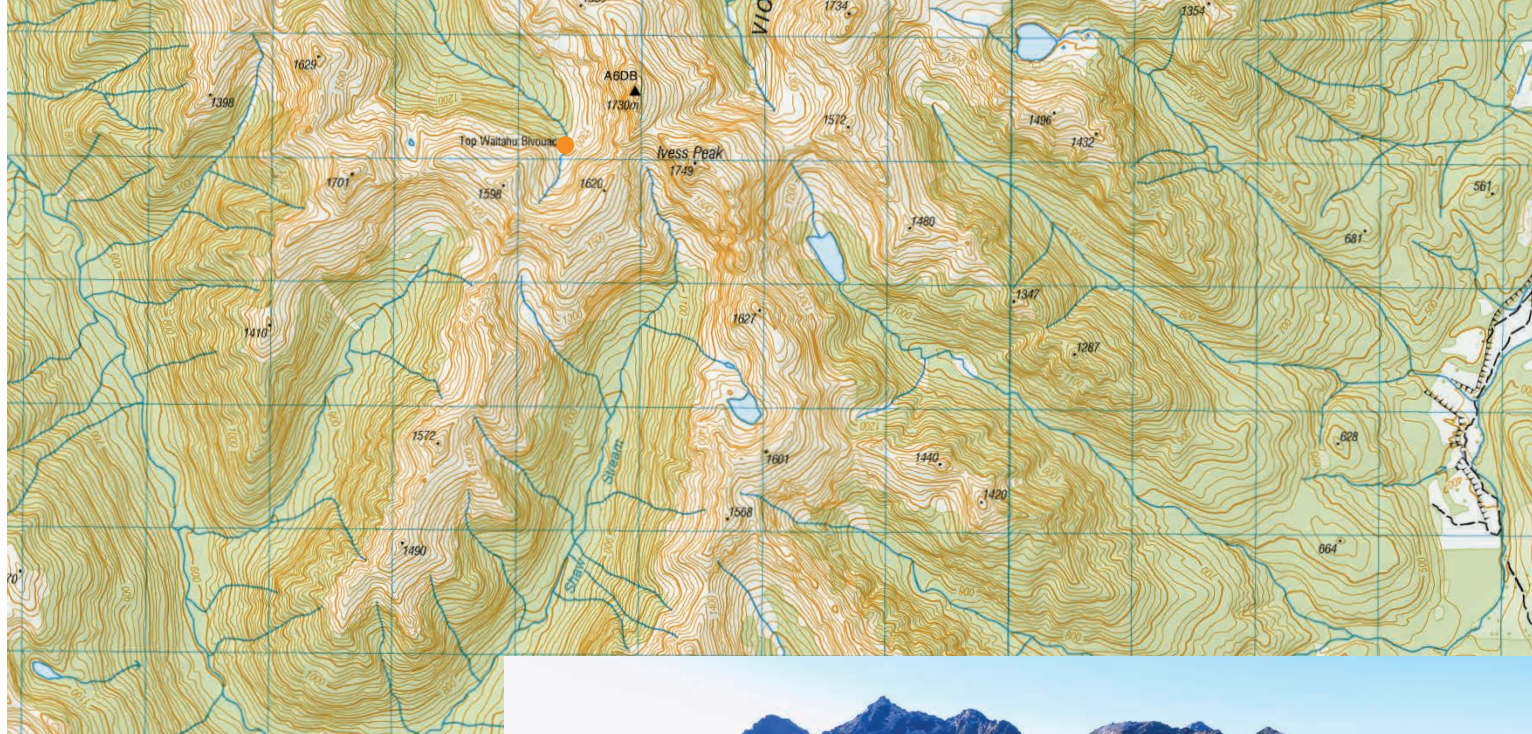
visit it. Too far, too complicated to reach, too lazy. Liz however, is an inveterate hut bagger and persistent in her enthusiasm. She supplied the motivation, even after a couple of postponements due to

weather. The Waitahu Valley is fairly long and untracked, your typical West Coast epic, so most folk choose a tops route instead that starts in the head of the Inangahua on SH6 near Rahu Saddle. This isn't exactly straightforward either and requires fine weather for the sections above the bushline.

The first part of the journey is up Lake Stream to the Lake Stream Biv which is located on a marshy flat in in the valley's headwaters. Both route and biv are DOC maintained and are in good condition. The so-called lake is more a glorified tarn, but it's a pleasant spot that gets surprisingly few visits given its closeness to the main road. The biv is a similar design to Top Waitahu but



Lake Stream Biv
looking downriver



without any form of heating. From here it's up through scattered beech forest and open marshy bits towards the open tops. A traverse of the 1700m Ives Peak is a technical job for climbers, and so the usual option is to drop down to large tarn above Shaw Stream. This is a beautiful spot and an ideal place to set up a camp to break the journey.

There are no easy lines from here to Top Waitahu which is through a high saddle in the head of Shaw Creek. It's a rough, scrubby, bluffy sidle from the tarn with only a couple safe lines down to the boulder field in the head of the valley. Travel through the jumbles of large moss-covered rocks interspersed with scrub and speargrass is slow. The upper stream is also full of boulders, but can be avoided by some judicious sidling through a small bluff system. Once over the saddle it's a straight descent down to the biv, with only a bit of alpine scrub and speargrass to hinder progress. The biv site is open and sunny and it was great to lounge around there in the autumn sun, drink coffee, and read the accounts of other epic journeys before heading back up and over the hill to our camp at the tarn. One can easily see why the helicopter is the preferred travel option up here.

The biv would be warm and toasty with that little coal range going. Someone had flown a bag of coal in and there is dry wood aplenty to be scavenged at the boundary of the forest. Times to get there are likely to vary considerably depending on the party's experience and conditions. I guess it could be done in a long day from SH6 or up the valley from Montgomerie Hut, but my recommendation would be to break it into two.

The most notable and surprising thing for me was the ruggedness and spectacular beauty of the place.

Having been spoiled by the grandeur of South Westland, I'd always considered the Victoria Range to be a somewhat benign with reasonably gentle and easy rolling tops. Not so folks. It's an area with a bit of something for everyone, most of it pretty wild, untracked, and in many places, seldom travelled.

More information on the Top Waitahu can be found at <http://remotehuts.co.nz/top-waitahu-biv.html>



Tarn above Shaw Stream - Mt Ives



Top Waitahu Biv looking downriver



Balancing rock in the head of Shaw Stream

REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

QUIETKAT E-BIKES

WRITTEN BY ~ WILLIE DULEY

Ben Searle putting the Apex Sport through its paces in East Coast tahr country

I first stumbled across the QuietKat brand a few years ago on social media when I saw some images of American hunters using their bikes to access hunting areas, towing dogs and lugging game meat around on the bike trailers

It certainly spiked my interest at the time as I'm always on the lookout for new and creative angles to incorporate into our television episodes.

Late last year while visiting distributor Ampro Sales in Wellington, the team mentioned they were looking at bringing these hunt specific 'QuietKat' e-bikes into the country and wondered if I'd be interested in being an early product tester. A very quick reply of "absolutely" from me has seen us putting the top spec Apex Pro through its paces since early in the year, and in recent months, the all-rounder Apex Sport, and hub-driven Ranger too.

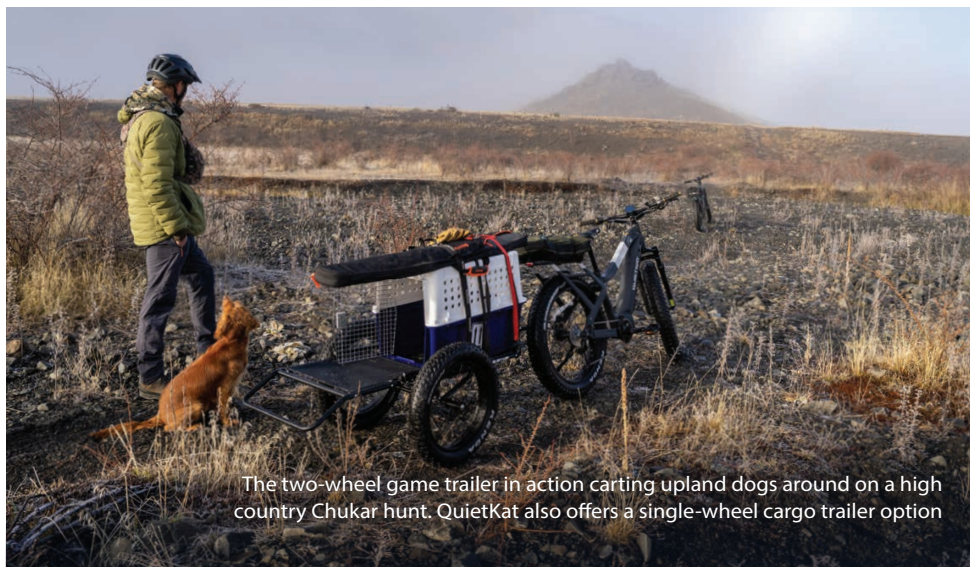
What sets these bikes apart from your standard e-bike you'll find in the local bike shop? As mentioned, they're designed with hunters and anglers in mind, specifically the off-road terrain we frequently travel and the heavy loads we're often faced with carrying. This sees them incorporate a heavy duty build quality powered by large 1000 watt motors, 4.5" fat tyres and considerable suspension travel to smooth the ride, all complimented by a range of accessories to carry plenty of gear whether in on-bike cargo baskets or tow-behind game trailers.

Your own personal hunting scenarios will largely dictate how useful you'll find these bikes, but for those who are often trudging on foot along 4WD tracks, farmland and forestry roads, they could be a practical and fun piece of kit to add to your collection.

It's worth pointing out to those who might be thinking they're now going to scour our public conservation land on two-wheels, that DOC only allows e-bikes 300 watt and below on bike tracks and

cycle ways, with the QuietKat's 1000 watt motors technically classifying them as a motorised vehicle under NZTA guidelines. This means that on public land, you are only permitted to use them where vehicle access is also allowed. In saying this, weather and track conditions often limit vehicle access to the dryer summer months in many places, so the bikes certainly offer new access opportunities. I've particularly found this the case in much of the South Island's well-tracked ex-station land that has now reverted back to public land through the tenure review process.

The key burning question I had about the bikes was what exact range performance could we expect out of the batteries. I'm still yet to answer that concisely even now after many trips, and it seems terrain, track conditions, temperatures, weight carried, and obviously the level of battery assistance you opt for have a large part



The two-wheel game trailer in action carting upland dogs around on a high country Chukar hunt. QuietKat also offers a single-wheel cargo trailer option



The Apex Sport, Ranger, and Apex Pro lined up in the South Island high country

to play. We mostly found ourselves using the bikes on eco-mode to conserve battery (there's a range of different VPO class switches/power options) through both pedal assist and using the hand throttle if riding standing up, and could generally expect a little over 20km's of mixed terrain travel on a single charge.

Biking with a heavy backpack is something I've tried to avoid following bad past experiences but it's definitely a far more manageable task with the power assistance of these bikes.

The accessories like the cargo basket were certainly useful for carrying and securing gear, and the trailers were a neat addition for hauling larger loads but are best suited to flatter ground as they can become a bit unstable on undulating terrain. We also tried the portable solar charger and while it did work, the practicalities of being on hand in those peak sunlight hours to manage it meant we found carrying a power bank unit like the Biolite BaseCharge a better

solution for topping up battery life on-hunt.

The heavy duty build quality does mean the bikes are heavy at approximately 30kg in weight and they're not something you want to be lifting frequently by yourself. This also means you'll need a suitably rated bike carrier to transport them to your hunting location. And while a blessing when power assisted, the fat tyres do make the bike hard to pedal over on any sort of incline once you're out of battery life.

The e-bike market isn't a cheap one if you're after something of quality and considering the QuietKat's superior build features and battery power, they've reasonably priced at \$7,699 for the Ranger, \$8,799 for the Apex Sport, and \$10,899 for the Apex Pro.

Whether it be for hunting access, on-farm use, or for general exploring a little further than you can muster on-foot, **one of the QuietKat models could be a worthy addition to your adventure toolkit.**



GripSport's Bike Rack from D&E Outdoors



The Pannier Cargo Basket carrying our BioLite power bank



Chukar camp scenes with the Apex Pro

| | Apex Pro | Apex Sport | Ranger |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| MOTOR: | 1000W Mid-Drive (VP0™) | 1000W Mid-Drive (VP0™) | 1000W Mid-Drive (VP0™) |
| BATTERY: | 17.25Ah 48V 828 Wh 4.54 kgs | 16Ah 48V 768Wh 4.54 kgs | 16Ah 48V 768Wh 4.54 kgs |
| RANGE: | 46 km unassisted, 83 km assisted | 38 km unassisted, 77 km assisted* | 38 km unassisted, 77 km assisted* |
| MODES: | Class 1, 2, 3, Unlimited, VPO | Class 1, 2, 3, Unlimited, VPO | Class 1, 2, 3, Unlimited, VPO |
| GEARS: | 9 Speed Drivetrain | SRAM 8 Speed Drivetrain | SRAM 7-Speed Drivetrain |
| SUSPENSION: | 140mm Inverted Suspension Fork | GTMRK 100mm Air Suspension Fork | 100mm Mozo Coil Suspension Fork |
| BRAKES: | TEKTRO 4-Piston Hydraulic Disc | Tektro 350 2-Piston Hydraulic Disc | TEKTRO 350 2-Piston Hydraulic Disc |
| WEIGHT: | 32.4 kgs (+ Battery) | 31.8 kgs (+ Battery) | 29.5 kgs (+ battery) |
| AXLE: | 197mm Thru Axle | 190mm Solid Axle | 175mm Solid Axle |
| RRP | \$10,899.00 | \$8,799.00 | \$7,699.00 |



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CERAKOTE

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FELDJAGD

FLUTED BARREL Available in: .223, .243, 6.5CM, 6.5PRC, .308, 30-06 & 300WM



DRYX LONG RANGE 6XC



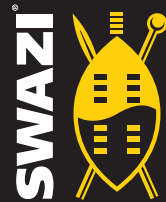
Optional Extra 10rnd mags available for .223 / .243 / 6.5CM / .308 / 6.5PRC

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STONE GLACIER TERMINUS ULTRALIGHT PACKS

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

Back in issue 97 we reviewed the Stone Glacier Col 4800 (79 litre) and the Sky 5900 (96 litre) packs, and I ended up by saying I was looking forward to reviewing their ultralight and voluminous Terminus 7000 and 8700, at 115l/1.79kg and 142l/1.93kg

As I said back then, these are the best volume for weight and spec packs I've ever seen! Well we've had the opportunity to use these Terminus packs for the last few months so now I can comment on more than just their specs!

These are the differences from the Col and Sky shelf packs previously tested:

- 1. The frame consisting of four carbon composite rods is sewn directly to the bag to make the strongest light weight frame system.**
- 2. The bag material features ultra high-molecular-weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) – a fiber that is 15x stronger than steel per unit of weight – blended with high-tenacity polyester. The fabric is then laminated with a waterproof film for protection from the elements. The result is a material that offers exceptional abrasion and tear resistance while remaining ultralight.**
- 3. The meat load cell is an internal sleeve instead of an external shelf.**

The 7000 has no external pockets other than the large lid pocket, whereas the 8700 has a vertical full length zippered pocket centre front as well as the lid. Both

have the internal spotting scope pocket which you access through the side zip. All pockets both external and internal are gusseted and shaped so you can actually use them even if the rest of the pack is full – a pet bug bear of mine with some packs.

The packs come with a full range of 13 top, front, side and bottom compression and attachment straps, to keep things snug when you're not using all the capacity, and for attaching things like rifles, tripods, walking poles etc to the outside.

The zips are all YKK size 10 with large cord loops so you can grip them with cold fingers etc.

Rather than having many external pockets like some packs, Stone Glacier provide accessory swing out pouches that clip into several different positions in the main bag or pockets. This way you can customise just where you store certain items, and also unclip the pouches

and take them separately into your tent without having to take the whole pack. They also provide excellent pouches and drink bottle holders that clip to the hip belt. The lid pocket is hydration bladder compatible, with a hose port for the drinking tube to exit.

Our whole crew has been using these packs all this season, and here are our observations so far:

The waist belt comes in three different sizes - small 28 to 30 inches, medium 31 to 36 inches and large 37 inches plus. I would normally consider myself a small to medium waist, but we all found we had to go a size larger than we might have expected. Not only to get sufficient strap length but also so the side lock buckles came round past your hip bones onto the flat section of your waist. Otherwise the buckles sit on a 45 degree angle which is partially unlocked and then tended to loosen more easily. We all found the harness system very comfortable, and the best we've encountered for packs in this lightweight category. With the shoulder and lumbar pads all being minutely Velcro adjustable and all the usual side and top load stabilisation straps, you can custom fit it to anyone's shape and preferences.

The range of accessory pouches etc is really good, and while we all thought them a bit of a gimmick to start with, one by one we all started attaching them to our packs – both the swing out pouches internally and the belt pouches and drink bottle holder on the hip belt. These certainly go a long way towards making up for not having as wider range

of external pockets as some other pack brands. And in some ways having these pouches inside but easily accessible through the full height double ended vertical zip meant the pack is cleaner and more streamlined externally for pushing through vegetation. And the slim hip belt pouches and drink bottle holder are accessible without removing your pack which is a bonus, especially for those of us who hate water bladders with hoses with a passion! They always leak, get caught, don't work, are beggars to fill etc. Give me a simple wide mouth bottle on my hip belt any day!

I do like an external spotting scope pocket, but I'm getting used to the Terminus' internal one, accessible again just inside the vertical zip. If choosing the voluminous 8700 it does have a full height external pocket on the front which is large enough to hold the largest spotters and tripods we use on any sort of pack trip. **It swallows up the Swarovski ATC and tripod with heaps of room left for other gear.** At only another 140gms over the 7000, the 8700 is becoming our pack of choice for not only this pocket, but the ability to expand it out and use all 142 litres when you are loaded up with meat on the homeward journey. With such a good array of compression straps all over the pack you can cinch it up when less full and you don't even notice it's such a large sized pack.

While no pack is fully waterproof, the new UHMWPE material on these packs is as close as you are going to get – to the extent we rarely bother taking pack covers anymore. And it seems particularly abrasion and rip resistant. So far we haven't holed any of these packs – not even Emil our cameraman and that's saying something!

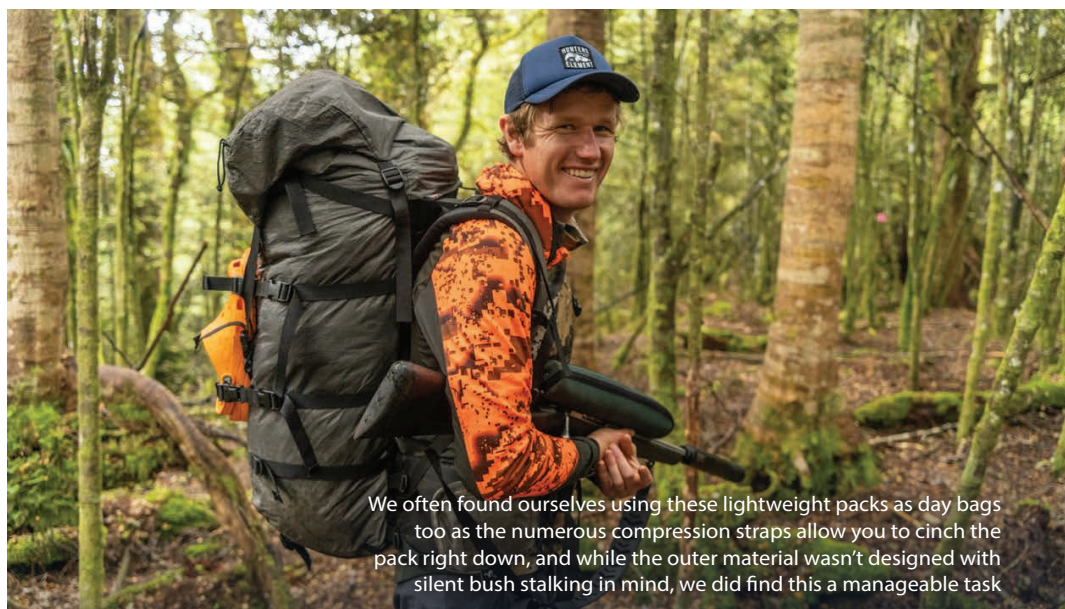
And the final word is as I said back in issue 97 – you will not find packs of these capacities and features at these weights anywhere else. **If you're a serious alpine hunter, have a very good look at Stone Glacier's Terminus range.**



Willie using the Terminus 7000 on an eight day post-rut Red stag hunt. You can see the handy accessory pockets and hydro holster in use on his waist belt



We preferred the larger Terminus 8700 which for an extra 140 grams in weight, gives you 27 litres more capacity and the handy external pocket you can see here on the rear of the pack



We often found ourselves using these lightweight packs as day bags too as the numerous compression straps allow you to cinch the pack right down, and while the outer material wasn't designed with silent bush stalking in mind, we did find this a manageable task



The swing out pocket tucked just inside the full length vertical zip



The internal load cell designed to carry boned out meat closest to your centre of gravity

NEMO SLEEP SYSTEM

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

Regular readers will recognise Nemo from last year when we reviewed the Tracker 2p tent, featured again here

Since then the First Lite collaboration range has extended, and our NZ distributor, Mountain Adventure, have got the best of the winter range below. This is some tough, lightweight gear with a lifetime warranty across the board.

STALKER SLEEPING BAG

The Stalker is the flagship bag in the First Lite partnership with Nemo, and the cipher camouflage features across the range in their 'stealth sleep system'. A -18°C rated winter bag, this is the gear you want for those frozen June and July missions.

Made with 800FP hydrophobic (and RDS certified) down for a great warmth to weight ratio, it comes in three sizes: Short (66 in/168 cm), Regular (72 in/183 cm) and Long (78 in/198 cm). I used the Long, which has ample room for blokes taller than me. At 6'1" and having used the Long now I would go back and see how the Regular fits. This was comfy but did cost a bit in weight. At 1.7kg for the Long the Regular shaves 250 grams off, down to 1.45kg.

The Long was spacious though - it left plenty of room to layer up underneath, and to move around during the night and not feel like you'd been wrapped in a down straightjacket - the stretch construction at the knees to allow for side sleeping really helped too.

As you'd expect the components were top quality. It uses a 20D Nylon Ripstop

shell and a smooth 30D Nylon Taffeta on the interior with a quality zip that never pinched.

The Stalker bag has been contoured to maximise heat retention for extreme cold. It has a shaped hood, not the two foot wide opening you see on some lower-end bags, and also includes a soft down collar you can Velcro together to stop drafts intruding around your neck. It also has a layer of synthetic insulation in the footbox, anticipating the inevitable brushes with the condensated walls of your tent and beefing up the warmth at your extremities.

The 'thermo gills' were a new one for me. These slits in the top allow you to open sections through the down (still with a nylon wall to prevent drafts) to regulate your temperature, a great addition for maximising the range of use for this bag - it's not winter all year!

The Long I had weighed in at 1.7kg, which is good for a very roomy -18 bag. Though it was a fairly bulky item in the pack (eight litres), I feel like the compression bag could have been tighter.

This is the perfect bag for doing the coldest of winter alpine trips, especially if you're using a 4wd or heli for access. It's packed full of features and has clearly had a lot of thought go into it. If you only do 10 day backpack trips then you'd probably look at some of the lighter options in the range - and suffer the reduced warmth - but for most hunters this is one of the best winter sleeping bags around for features and warmth.



The Stalker sleeping bag, Fillo Elite pillow and Longbow Alpine sleeping pad



Details like added synthetic insulation in the footbox show the level of thought in the product



Safe to say the gear was tested in some cold conditions - my 1 litre Nalgene bottle froze solid inside the tent this night!



Nemo's specialty Spaceframe baffles provided great stability



The highly effective Vortex pump sack



An excellent low profile valve system



The thermo gill ventilation sections

Longbow Alpine Mummy Sleeping Pad

The Longbow Alpine is the perfect complement to the Stalker bag. A comfortable, R4.8 rated sleeping pad to keep you insulated from the snow and ice, it was comfortable and innovative. It's available in the mummy shape which I used, or a conventional rectangle.

The low profile valve was simple and effective. It has two caps recessed into one another. With a cap for closed, another cap nestled inside that opens the non-return valve, and then you remove that as well to deflate the sleeping pad.

The Vortex pump sack was superb. Three breaths and you're done, about 30 seconds of work! Plenty of pump sacks take more time than they're worth, but this was fantastic with its easy attachment and simple closure system. It is a stiffened nylon bag, with no clip or roll. You just blow into the bag, snap it closed, and roll down to squeeze air into the bag. Quick, effective, and didn't leave you feeling like you're trying to exist in the

death zone on Everest.

Using an pump sack is much better for the insulation of the sleeping pad, you're not blowing hot, moist air straight out of your mouth. Too much moisture inside the sleeping pad can cause mould.

The Longbow Alpine uses durable 20D (top) and 40D (bottom) nylon along with mirrored metallic film to create a durable, puncture resistant pad that is also very quiet. Some insulated pads are crinkly and squeaky but the Longbow provides a great sleeping experience, especially with the 8cm thickness!

Weighing in at 560gm with the pump sack it is a winter-weight sleeping pad, but comfort priorities don't come free. At 183cm long and 51cm wide, it really is the perfect pairing for the Stalker sleeping bag for maximum comfort a frigid winter night in tahr camp.

FILLO ELITE FIELD CAMP PILLOW

This is the first camp pillow I have ever liked. High praise indeed! Normally I just bunch up my clothes and use that for a pillow, but that can get tricky

though, by day five of a trip the spare clothes pile isn't so clean any more. Besides that though I've never liked how inflatable camp pillows seal to your ear and get cold overnight.

The Fillo Elite addresses both of those issues perfectly. With a soft, padded cotton jersey covering to create a genuine pillow feel it's not a case of skin-on-nylon. This covering is also removable and machine washable. The internal air cell is lined with 100% post-consumer recycled PrimaLoft® insulation, meaning it won't go cold overnight, and you can feel good about it. All this is a tiny package that weighs 77 grams (>3oz) and is the size of a lime! It has well and truly sold me on the idea.

This sleep system is a winner if you're after clever, warm and durable gear to keep you warm and well rested during the coldest months of the year. And when I say durable, that's not a cop-out for making things heavy, it's that Nemo have reinforced all of the right bits in the right places to make your dollar last longer.

If you want to stay toasty, Nemo have you sorted.



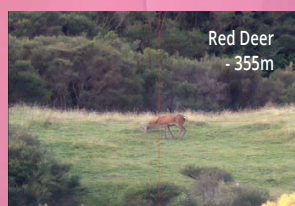
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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

MURPHY'S LAW

Opening 2023 was nearly a cliché disaster

On the heels of a contentious 2022 with some disputes over a public river, perforated decoys and a liberated floating maimai we were looking forward to a change of scenery in 2023.

We had a fun family day getting set up out the West Coast, two hours' drive from any drama in a magnificent slow corner of the river, it looked perfect. It had a great big sandbar for loafing and ducks pouring in all the while. We repurposed an old calf shelter roof to build an epic 3x3m maimai with extensive rails for scrubbing all around the sides to allow for 360° shooting. It had a shelf for the BBQ, seating, and doors for the dogs – any more and we'd need a building consent! We stood back and dusted our hands after a great day's work, brimming with excitement for Opening Weekend.

A month later we had schemed plenty of plans. Kitted out a duck retrieving boat – a camouflage-painted inflatable tender with a leaking transom and a 20 year old 2hp motor. Doing the basic steps of preparation with the new matching black Labradors, our boy 'Murphy' and Lucas and Ngaire's 'Goose'. All of the fun stuff before Opening - honestly it's nearly as fun as the day!

All was going swimmingly until the day before Opening - we got 'the call'. The farmer had double booked, and our carefully prepared maimai was forfeit ...

More than somewhat disgruntled, I pried the knives from Sam's hands and we agreed to shoot somewhere else on the river, heading out on Opening-eve to move the maimai and scrounge a new spot. The laugh was that with heavy rain during the week our beautiful maimai was underwater anyway! The Ironman winch soon relieved the roof of its foundations, demolishing all of our hard work, and we towed it away to find somewhere new.

Options were limited, and it took all afternoon to make a new maimai on a random stretch of river with not a lot going for it. It was a fairly straight stretch with no cover but there was evidence of ducks using the banks fairly regularly. The powerlines nearby were a key challenge to make for sporting shooting, for two reasons – A.) missing the powerlines, B.) shooting ducks who are trying to miss

them as well. I hope Trustpower don't read this article.

The maimai was less impressive than its former iteration, it probably reflected the emotions of its builders on both occasions. To be honest it looked like a slum shack with camo nets but it actually worked really well, room for five with enough lateral view for us to keep an eye on circling ducks. It got added to and tweaked during the day, resulting in a functional, if ugly, Frankenstein.

After finishing in the pouring rain we retreated to the woolshed and soon restored our spirits with a hot shower, followed by roast lamb on the Weber and a fizzy beverage or two around the Bakewell Burner. We schemed the evening away: decoy, boat, spinner and dog locations. What the wind was doing, and would do. Who would shoot where. The military operation was underway!

We awoke to a nice consistent downstream breeze, which meant setting the decoys upstream of the maimai made for some nice pass shooting when it worked. I love the way rivers give the decoys motion, it made our job a lot easier.

On daylight the first ducks moved past, and much to our delight we had a lone drake cupping in to the decoys. Lachlan



The dream spot - the nice slow bend in the river created a large beach loaded with duck sign and an awesome maimai



The preparation for Opening Weekend is an enormous part of the fun



Demolishing our maimai on the eve of Opening was not part of the plan

is always quick on the trigger and gave us our first bird for the season.

The shooting went quite well considering the second-rate location, we snared nice groups of birds making their way upriver from shooters on the estuary and lower reaches. We learnt some hard lessons on the spinners. It was important to have them upwind, distracting ducks from any movement in the maimai, and a functioning remote was crucial. It was a great tool for attracting ducks attention, but you had to switch it off as they were coming in to land or they got suspicious. It certainly kept cagey ducks circling for another pass if they didn't like things on the first approach.

Retrievals were entertaining. In the big flooded river anything over three ducks meant we had to launch the 'assault craft' or you'd end up a kilometre downriver by the time the dog had got all the ducks back to you. Our assault craft had some severe issues though, in that the motor had no reverse and the transom had parted ways with the hull. To go backwards you had to spin the motor 180'



The replacement maimai came out alright all things considered



The terrible two, Murphy and Goose, getting used to the river a few months before Opening



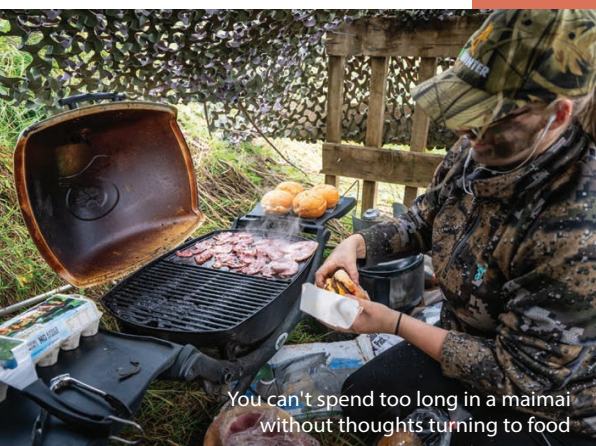
Poppy did the retrieval heavy lifting for the last time in 2023. She's now enjoying a very relaxed life after passing the baton to her sons



Lucas having a ball piloting the 'assault craft' for the big retrieves



Despite the rough and ready construction the new maimai went well



You can't spend too long in a maimai without thoughts turning to food



with a judicious amount of fixed throttle, then spin it back once you were clear of the decoys. One time I hurried down to the beach, pulled on the old Suzuki and spun it back as soon as it fired. The throttle cleared out the 20 year old gunk in the fuel lines and all of a sudden the rpm tripled. This pulled me backward at a fierce speed, flooding water around the leftovers of the transom. Quite alarmed I stood up to better reach the motor to turn it around. This tipped the back end further underwater, and while I successfully spun the prop around to face forward, the sudden surge forward nearly tipped me over the back. **All of which contributed greatly to the hilarity on shore.** Luckily the boat was an inflatable as from then on it carried around about 80 litres of 'ballast'!

Our shooting was as good as our calling, average at best, but we had a very enjoyable day. There was banter and barbecues, dogs and disgraces. Despite the steady stream of ducks, the highlight came with another species. We had five guns going when everyone was shooting, and while I was across the river searching for a flapper I heard the urgent call 'swans!'. I hurried back to the bank, upstream from the maimai, in time to witness a flight of five big black bombers beating upwind just above the river's surface. Four crumpled as they passed the maimai and the fifth banked over me, crashing to the grass as I let the Beretta loose on the massive bird. **That had the dog working hard, but it was mighty satisfying to get one each!**

As the day quietened I decided to bring young Murphy over to get him used to the bustle of a maimai and the noise of the guns. Imagine my surprise when on the next retrieve a black bundle of five month old Labrador flew

out of Sam's hands to join me on the riverbank – not only join me but leap in to swim 20 metres of flooded river and grab the duck floating down! Not quite what I had envisaged for his quiet introduction, but boy was I chuffed.

We had a few ducks down in the paddocks behind us so I worked with him, walking downwind on the grazed grass so he had some easy ones to figure things out. He took to it like a duck to water (you're welcome) and I was having a ball. I knew one had fallen across the road, so we ducked over and Murphy soon started tracking miles out. It was surely further than the duck had gone, and I couldn't see anything lying there, but I thought hey, what's the harm in him burning off some energy?

Hooning along a good 250m in front of me he soon neared some rushes and all 11kg of Labrador pounced on a fairly lively flapper, wrestling it to the ground



I was quite chuffed with Murphy's drive at five months old

and dragged it back to me! I don't know how many times it's been said in this magazine, but trust the damn dog!

We finished up on 22 mallards and greys, five swans and a pheasant – including one banded bird all the way out there. It wasn't the dream hunt in the place we'd been planning around for so many months, but we did pretty well on short notice. With some more calling practice and fine-tuned decoys I think we'd do even better – not to mention some shooting practice!

It was satisfying because we earned every bird, it wasn't a well-fed pond somewhere. River birds are always transient, looking for the best spot, so there's satisfaction in doing well. **Everyone had a shot, from young Lachlan to Samantha and Shayla - while Trent, Lucas, Jake and I competed for the titles of worst caller and worst shot!**



A very enjoyable weekend despite the setbacks

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OPENING WEEKEND TRIPLE TREAT

WRITTEN BY ~ TRACEY MORROW

Three days of hunting the big water on Opening Weekend gave us more than we bargained for in what was an epic treat of waterfowling and camaraderie

I have lost count of how many Opening Weekends there have been, but there have been countless that could be classed as unremarkable. This one will be hard to beat.

This year, a new mega blind and location for us raised hopes and expectations but the site was largely unproven apart from a few previous scouting expeditions and the odd wee hunt by Hunter in previous seasons. Several weekends were spent with the team and Hunter and Jovan did an extensive pre-nail and paint. Then there was a massive effort by Wayne, Hamish, Luke, Steve, Brett and Hunter to build a large blind only accessible by boat. **Friday night's arrival was a sporadic but raucous affair;** a mad scramble in what was left of the daylight to get supplies and decoys out to the blind, as well as a final scrub-up. The hype was on, and the excitement

was building. Weather conditions weren't nearly as exciting, with frost, low cloud and little, if any wind forecast. **At least for once it wasn't looking like t-shirt and sunscreen weather!**

The weather gods delivered exactly as predicted. It was a very cold start in the frost, and as sunrise approached, the mist and fog set in. Thank goodness for GPS systems and smartphones which took the guesswork out of the trip across the water! With no lighting or landmarks for miles finding the blind could have been like looking for a wounded mallard in a reed bed. With eight of us at the blind, all the water-bound feet set about distributing

decoys in the bay of shallow water in front. The scene was set.

Opening minute came and went with little to no action. The light was low, fog and mist even lower and, apart from a handful of late starters off the crop paddocks behind us, there was relatively nothing on the fly. The odd downed bird presented challenging retrieving for the dogs as visibility was extremely limited. We held back our young dog, Apache, and let his more experienced mother, Pearl, handle the early morning retrieves. Our thoughts turned to hot coffee and some morning chitchat as we held fast to the forecast being right and the fog lifting late morning.

Lift it did. We could hear machinery in the distance and expected birds to arrive as farmers started to feed out. A nearby landowner gave us a flyover in his chopper, which also helped get the birds flying. As land became visible some distance off under the inversion layer and light sporadically hit the water, the large decoy spread came

into its own and the birds really started to move. As a non-shooter, it is always interesting to note the shift in feeling in the blind amongst the hunters when there are birds in the bag.

With no wind to speak of, it became very apparent how important a well-planned and executed decoy spread was, with visibility, sound and movement key to enticing the birds in. And, of course, good loud calling. A selection of mostly Avery GHG Mallard floaters with a mix of full bodies, spoonies, Canadas and swans were set out to give birds three landing options, left, middle and right finishes. All up, there were around 140 decoys out for the weekend, a few Lucky Duck spinners and agitators to finish off the spread, and it only needed a few wee tweaks as the weekend progressed.

With regular flights of pairs and small groups of mostly mallards, we started racking up a nice tally of birds. There was good, consistent shooting from the group, some nice shots from the gals Holly and Amy, and Pearl was getting a good work out in the water. Girl power was on point and at one stage, Pearl executed a very long distance pick up. Apparently, it was not her longest but, according to the boss, a close second at a couple of hundred metres. She's a weirdo retriever who likes to talk. Shots fired and she's all over it like a blues singer with a badass southern drawl. If it's a parry down, she goes into overdrive, declaring it's all hers in a yodel that would make the Topp Twins proud.

Apache (or Patch as he's affectionately known, Pearl's son and the only bloke in the weekend's canine pack) finally got his chance to impress. He's a young dog at 19 months old with basic training, but he proved himself nicely on the first day, with half a dozen well-executed retrieves. **He didn't hesitate in picking up birds and his nose was spot on. In classic young dog fashion, his handing over was less than perfect, but ongoing practice will hopefully make it perfect.** He's a slighter build than his mother and doesn't have an exceptional coat so keeping him warm with a new Avery neoprene jacket proved invaluable in the cold conditions, as it did on all the dogs until the sun came out. Hypothermia in dogs can happen very quickly and it pays to be aware of the symptoms and act immediately. We were careful not to overwork him and made sure he was well-rested and fed at the end of the day. On big water, the dogs certainly prove their worth, and in the rough conditions we had on the third day, even more so.

Day one ended in beautiful sunshine with no wind and 80+ birds (mallards



A blind like no other built by and for the team



In the doldrums on day one



Strike a pose Holly. "Make like a duck" they said!



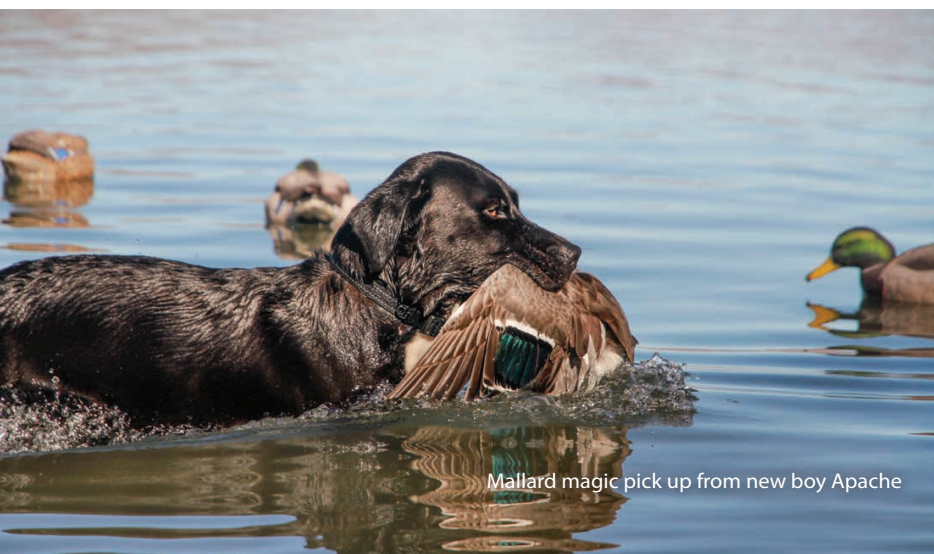
Just a little swan surfing with Pearl



The girls got 'em, Pearl and Holly



A little father and son decoy dancing



Mallard magic pick up from new boy Apache



Jovan loving every mud-bound minute

and parries) on the board. With exhausted dogs tucked up in kennels, a happy crew gathered around the dinner table on Saturday night, and all discussion turned to the weather for the second day, which looked very much like a repeat of the first.

Friends Bridget and Steve, who were shooting a little further away from us, were unlucky to have only picked up a few birds.

However, they reported seeing a large group of geese on the water, which were keeping approximately 20 swans away. It seemed that the geese were also preventing the ducks from coming towards our direction, but instead were pushing them back around. Lucky us.

Sunday dawned grey and miserable with a low blanket of inversion cloud as far as the eye could see. Getting to the blind was interesting - speeding along in the swirling mist on the water with no visibility was like heading into the great abyss. It was cold and got progressively colder. It was like the whole world had shut down that morning; nothing much was moving including us, except for the standard decoy tweaking and Holly entertaining us with decoy dancing. **When the birds fail to fly there is nothing for it but to fire up the grill and eat, right? We were in for a treat.** Chef Jovan, Wayne and Hamish took the tongs and turned over tasty morsels all day long, game sausages, bacon hash brown butties, and blue-fin sashimi, nicely rounded off with coffees and copious quantities of homemade ginger crunch. It's a helluva thing, opening weekend! We eat, shoot and laugh like royalty. It was pretty much a day of foodie treats, good banter, hearty laughs, picture-taking and, of course, birds. The gals headed back to camp early to put on the mutton roast and the guys weren't far behind us as it became evident the birds were all settled in elsewhere. What would day three bring? Trick or treat?

Fog! Another start in the gloom of a quiet, still, fog-bound morning with only the promise of a



southerly change to keep us upbeat. By mid-morning the fog had lifted, and the birds were keen to decoy, but it was still fairly slow. Half of the original crew had returned home for work but Alister from Hunting & Fishing Timaru (and a mega tub of KFC) joined us for the day, and boy did he pick it! What a day! The southerly arrived with full force out of nowhere, and the big water changed from still to white caps within 15 minutes. It was showtime.

If you have watched the new WW2 Apple series "Masters of the Air", you will understand when I say the sky was alive with flying machines.

There were ducks coming at us from all directions, swans skimming the white caps and geese running for cover behind us. The wind direction did not in any way make it favourable for shooting as the birds were coming at us from the right, sweeping around behind the blind and straight over the top or swinging in from the left, paddles down and into the decoys leaving little time to think or aim. It was first-up best-dressed for the rest of the day. Fast and furious, and oh so much fun to watch. Alister, Hunter, Hamish, Steve and Brett nailed some very difficult birds in what was a couple of hours of incredibly satisfying waterfowling. Bridget whipped up a few tasty morsels on the grill, and all was perfectly right with the world.

Retrieving was no easy task given the choppy water and waves barrelling straight into the base of the blind. Alister's wire-haired pointer, Sika, got

a fantastic workout and made some beautiful retrieves in conditions could easily be put off a young dog, including a big bulky swan. Steve's Storm made marathon swims out to pick up several wounded and other birds carried way back behind us into the scrub by the wind. Pearl picked up a huge swan from a long way out, literally surfing her way back in behind the big bird. Apart from the bird action, it was quite the spectacle watching the dogs do what they love in an environment that was full on, for the best part of the afternoon.

As a photographer, you always go prepared for everything and hope for everything to happen. I have missed getting "the" shot so many times, but the weekend, and in particular the third day, produced a mother-load of images to sort through once home. To have mallards flying so close to the blind, and circling multiple times in their bid to get down onto the water was a photographer's treat, and for the first time I had more than a handful of shots to choose from. We watched not only the mallards and parries work the airwaves but a few spoonies too, mobs of teal racing across the surface of the water, geese sneaking into the sheltered spots on the water's edge and large groups of swans literally bouncing over the big water.

Packing up in the wind and waves was no easy task. A blind full of birds alone would take a dedicated

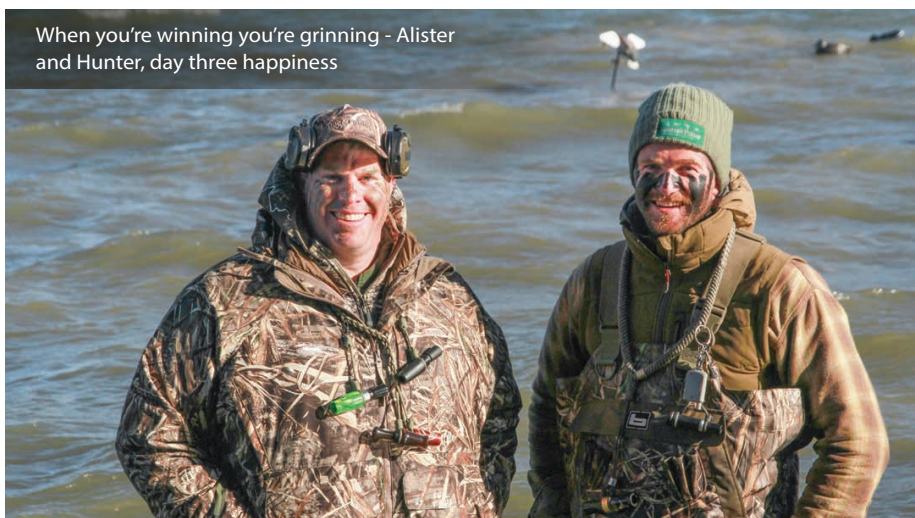
boat-load to get back to camp in order to process the meat the following day (a three hour marathon by Hunter, Hamish and Alister). The final count came in at 187 birds - mostly mallards, a few parries, one spoonies and three swans. With all hands on deck, we made a trip back to camp on rough water, loaded to the gunnels, the wind finally starting to drop, and the dogs buggered and practically falling asleep standing up. **A few hours later, watching the water turn back to a calm, glassy surface and a fabulous sunset take place, we quickly reflected on what had been an epic weekend in this new hunting haven - a triple treat of water-fowlers, weather and well-deserved birds! It doesn't get any better.**



A blind built to hold them!



When you're winning you're grinning - Alister and Hunter, day three happiness





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Grand Winner

Marlow Harper (7) shot his first goat with Dad's 223



Joshua Gredig with a young stag shot using a Browning 308



George Mead (4) with his first hare! Shot in the Taihape highcountry



Kade Towler was hunting with Dad and his Poppa in Taihape. Shot at 200m with Dad's 7mm-08



Isabella (5) and Marley (2) into their first pig hunt with Dad, Paul Sleeman



Joe Moulder with his first tahr on public land. The same long weekend as his sister Rosa got hers.



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Winchester is rebranding its iconic Super-X centrefire ammo, so this season hunters will see a phasing in of the new Power Point packaging, but be assured, you're getting exactly the same identical ammo, no matter what box it's in.

While Super-X first took the hunting world by storm over 100 years ago, it was 1961 when a new chapter began in its legendary reputation with the introduction of the Winchester Power Point projectile. How legendary? Well Winchester state that the Power Point bullet has accounted for more deer kills than any other Winchester load! With the Power Point projectile being the feature component, Winchester are rebranding Super-X to Power Point so the hunter selecting his or her ammo in-store, will recognise instantly, the main feature of this ammunition.

Looking back to 1921, it was Winchester's then President, John Olin, who developed the concept of Super-X centrefire ammo. Olin theorised that progressive-burning powders could produce greater velocities and more energy without creating pressure spikes. This stood Super-X apart at the time and began the first chapter in the 100-year success story that continues today.

Fast forward to 2024 and Winchester celebrate the success of the Power Point projectile by honouring it in the Super-X rebrand. As said, only the name has changed. All the components are still

manufactured to exacting standards by Winchester itself, apart from the powder which is these days commissioned to Hodgdon. So what's so great about the bullet performance? Experts state it achieves a very high impact, so with correct placement is unlikely to pass through an animal without inflicting a fatal wound cavity. Tests and history show it is particularly well suited to deer size game, as it is designed to mushroom to twice its original diameter on impact and retain a healthy percentage of its original weight for penetration. Therefore, a trusted choice for more quick humane kills. To achieve this performance, the bullet features a soft lead tip which on impact, is forced toward the rear of the bullet creating that trademark mushroom. Its notched jacket helps achieve a very uniform level of expansion, and while in flight maintaining a high degree of accuracy.

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HUNTING NOORD HOLLAND WILDFOWL AND HARE

WRITTEN BY | ANDREW BALCOMBE

THE ALARM EJECTED ME OUT OF BED AT 5AM AND I MADE THE HOUR LONG DRIVE FROM MY HOME IN ZUID (SOUTH) HOLLAND TO A HAMLET IN THE FLAT FARMING POLDERS OF NOORD (NORTH) HOLLAND, ABOUT 20 MINUTES OUTSIDE THE DUTCH CAPITAL OF AMSTERDAM.

When I arrived, I was greeted by Frans, who I had met six years earlier during a wild boar and deer hunt in the Netherlands' eastern Veluwe region.

Originally born and raised in Tasmania, I had moved to The Hague a good number of years earlier. After our first meeting, Frans had invited me on a hunt in Noord Holland and we had been meeting there every year since.

Frans' daughter, Jitske, was also joining us and had been going on hunting trips with her dad since she was six years old. Jitske was accompanied by her friend Bart-Jan and by Niels, who I had joined on several hunts previously. Camiel, a long-time mate of Niels, also joined us.

On this morning, Niels and I would be going together to a goose hide at the end of a kilometre-long paddock (also known as a polder). These paddocks, like much of the Dutch farming and residential land, are about a metre under sea level. The low-lying land is shielded from flooding by dikes of built-up earth ramparts running parallel to canals and other water bodies.

We walked in the dark toward the pink horizon in the east, where the sun was rising. It was a beautiful clear and crisp morning with not a breath of wind. As we reached the hide, I could hear the morning calls of thousands of geese roosting on the waters of a wide canal behind a high dike. Judging by the sheer volume of wildfowl noise, I felt that we were soon going to be in for quite an experience.



The target species that hunters are allowed to bag at this time of the year are the introduced and heavily built Canada goose, the smaller European greater white-fronted goose, the graylag goose and the mallard duck. When we arrived, Niels and I spent a few minutes setting up goose decoys on the pasture near the hide. The hide was concealed at the end of a drainage ditch and was covered in camouflaged netting. **Along for the fun was Niels' one-year old Vizsla gun dog Harvey, who was quivering in his excitement to get after some downed birds.**

As the darkness evaporated to a gunmetal blue and candy floss pink, we looked on in awe as dozens of formations of geese flew high overhead. The lack of wind, which often forces the birds to come in lower, was absent this morning and it looked like the conditions were going to be challenging.

We had brought along a megaphone to help us in attracting curious wildfowl onto our decoys. The megaphone was a new piece of kit, which used several downloaded recordings of goose chatter and calls. As the geese flew overhead, the megaphone would hopefully bring them lower to investigate our decoys.

Niels was the main gunner that day as my chief task was to record the action with my camera. It was a spectacular morning, flocks of migrating birds heading south for the winter filled the air and European spoonbills, silver egrets and cormorants flew around our hide, unaware of our presence.

The goose numbers in this region of the Netherlands were especially high and the district was inside a 20-kilometre radius of Schiphol Airport. **This meant that the Dutch government had decided to allow goose hunting to reduce the threat to air traffic.**

More geese flew over but they stayed high. The bird's movements were reflected on the water of the drainage ditch, and Harvey let out excited whimpers every time he saw them.

While we were waiting, Niels noticed a single duck making its way towards us low and fast and told Harvey to be still. When it came into range, he stood up and swung onto the bird. The first shot missed, but the second achieved a better result and a male mallard dropped from the sky.

Unexpectedly, a group of greater white-fronted geese came in at a low angle from the south also moving fast. Niels rose and fired twice but the birds kept going unscathed.

It wasn't long until another flight of geese came in and when they were overhead

A flock of mallard ducks



Frans working the field with the town church behind

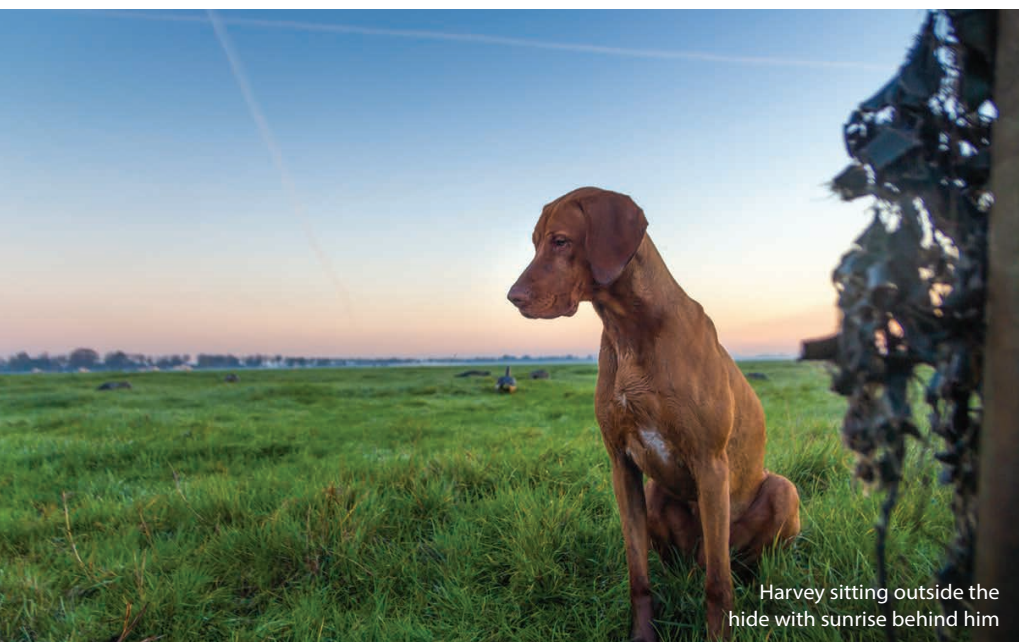


Niels dropping a grey goose as it came in to the decoys





Harvey and Neils at the hide



Harvey sitting outside the hide with sunrise behind him

Niels rose and fired. A bird dropped out of the air and landed in the paddock across from our hide.

Harvey went into action and crossed the flooded ditch and quickly located the bird, but he wasn't sure what to do with it. He sniffed and nudged it with his nose and tried to get a grip on the bird's body. He then got spooked and backed off a little until Niels joined him. **This gave him more confidence to pick up the bird and they both returned to the hide.**

Before long, the light had cleared and the combination of our megaphone caller and the decoys proved too tempting for a flight of three graylag geese. The birds circled lower and lower, and when they were about 30 metres away, Niels stood up. This time he had his eye in and his first shot claimed the bird closest to us. The remaining two quickly tried to regain altitude, but they weren't fast enough and the second one was also plucked from the air.

Harvey was released and he found the

first bird and brought it over to us. This bird had been winged, so Niels finished it quickly. It looked as though Harvey had used up all of his enthusiasm with the first bird and was a bit distracted by the time he reached the second, which lay lifeless and still. After some coaxing, he finally brought that one to us as well. We placed the birds among the decoys and went back to the hide and waited.

The high-flying waves of greater white-fronted geese were now replaced by more numerous numbers of graylag geese and it didn't take long for them to find our decoys.

Four graylag geese circled high above as the megaphone screeched out its calls. They made a second pass and then came in to land. Niels lined up and fired, dropping the first bird among the decoys where it lay still. The others reacted and flew over the dike, making it impossible for a second shot.

We decided to call it a morning as the sun was getting higher in the sky. As we started packing up the decoys, another

group of geese flew over. Luckily Niels was ready and managed to drop one just before it went over our heads.

Harvey didn't have to travel far in order to retrieve this one! We collected the birds between us and carried them back to the farmstead.

When we met with the others, it looked like the still conditions had also factored in to their hunt as they had only bagged a couple of birds. **Our megaphone seemed to have given us an edge in attracting the geese to fly lower.**

From the small hamlet, we moved further north to an area renowned for its large numbers of European brown hare. The hare thrived on rich pasture and crop land, and they had few predators to lower their numbers.

When we assembled at the next farmstead, Jitske introduced us to Willem who was a friend of hers. Willem had learned that Jitske was a keen hunter and wanted to see what it was like. He had had his first taste of hunting while in New Zealand working on a sheep property as an exchange student. While there, he had hunted wild boar and feral goats. Willem's presence also gave the group an extra hand with driving the hare onto waiting guns.

In the Netherlands, the paddocks are long strips of land separated by shallow canals or drainage ditches. These trenches filled with water also act as fences to keep both livestock and fleeing hares in. The technique often used in this part of the world was to set up 'shooting posts' at the end of a paddock, and then use beaters to drive the hare onto the waiting guns. **The beaters also have the opportunity to bag a hare if it's safe to do so.**

Willem was a handy addition to the group because I was suffering from a minor Achilles heel problem, which meant that I was uncertain how long I could walk in the sticky clay mud.

As we walked out onto the first paddock, I noticed the mud was not as deep as it had been in previous years. I put this down to the drought that the Netherlands had experienced a few months before. It seems unlikely, but this normally waterlogged country had seen its driest period in decades. The drought caused water shortages and the much-revered potato crops had also been badly affected.

We looked out over a field of newly sown grass and watched a hare about 50 metres away bounce off into the distance. The guys who were manning the end shooting posts hadn't reached their position yet, so the hare made it to the end of the paddock unhindered and



The gun post guys making their way into the field



A hunter concealed behind a post



Frans with Camiel's big mallard drake he retrieved from the drain



Jitske with her hare

zipped under a fence.

Once everyone was in position, we spread out in a line and moved forward, making noise and walking diagonally left to right to push the hare ahead of us. In the distance, a flock of mallard ducks came in low over Camiel's position, the crump of a shot sounded and one of the birds dropped into a canal. **Frans, who was wearing waterproof waders, retrieved the large male mallard that Camiel had bagged.** Due to the wishes of the farmer, dogs were not allowed on this property, so all the retrieving had to be done by hand.

As we continued the drive, hare sprang off out ahead of us and the guns of the shooting posts came to life.

It was the first paddock and already we had bagged a good number of hares. The next paddock we moved onto was filled with a recently harvested crop of cauliflower. I noticed there were still a few heads of the crop left by the harvester

and was hoping that this might attract the hare.

Frans was on the far side, Willem and Jitske were in the middle and I was on the outside edge. Before long, hares were springing away from us in the distance, and as we reached about halfway one that was waiting for the last possible moment exploded into action. The fast-moving animal went in the opposite direction than expected, and Jitske had to twist to get her Berretta 20 gauge onto it. She snapped off two quick shots but it didn't stop.

We reached the end of the paddock and talked with the gun post guys who were delighted to report they had bagged another three animals. This place was living up to expectations despite the dryer conditions. Willem also showed that he was completely at ease in the hunting scene, and had picked up a number of the bagged hare and prepared them for dressing by emptying their bladders.

We moved onto another paddock full of cauliflower, but by this time my Achilles heel was starting to give me some problems. **Rather than make it worse, I decided to wait at a safe distance halfway up the paddock and photograph the guys moving through it.** As Jitske came near, we talked about how this paddock seemed empty of animals. I found some harder-packed earth to walk on and followed the hunting party as it moved on. Not a minute later, a hare sprang into action 20 metres to Jitske's right and she raised her Berretta and fired. The hare somersaulted through the air and Jitske smiled broadly as she walked over and picked it up. Frans also had luck with another hare that went behind him and he snapped off two shots to bag it. We had been on the paddocks for just two hours and had bagged enough hares to satisfy everyone's game meat needs. Niels had bagged so many that he could hardly stand up under the weight as he carried them back to the farmhouse. In this neck of the woods, it is tradition that everyone carries out what they have shot.

As we walked back to the vehicles, a huge flock of mallards flew behind us with the sunshine highlighting their plumage, making a perfect image for my camera.

At the end of the afternoon, we had a nice mix of duck and hare for our larders, and I had to ask myself, was there any better way to spend a weekend than with friends out hunting?





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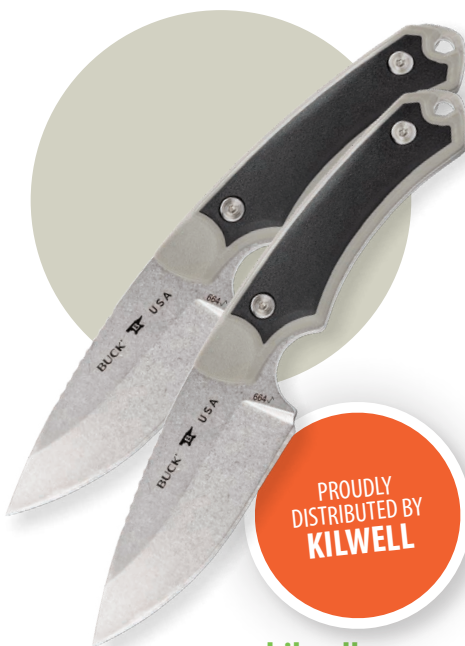
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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON ~

POTTED DUCK

Now that the duck season has finished, what do I do with them?

I hear most people get salami made with theirs, if they can find a butcher that will accept the meat due to the shot that may be in it as it blunts the mincer blades! Those who don't have a duck plucker, or use wax to remove the feathers, will probably just breast them out. However this recipe uses the legs and the old-time technique of cooking it slow, then shredding the meat, packing it back into moulds, and sealing it with butter.

The reason for sealing it with butter is that it has great keeping qualities, and before refrigeration was available, the main ways to preserve meat were to either to salt it, pickle it, smoke it or bury it in the ground. Around the 16th century it was found that if it was

potted and had a layer of butter, it was preserved and kept longer due to the butter seal.

Potted duck is similar to the French Rillettes; rich and savoury in taste but less fatty. **In the recipe I call for French quatre épices, which is a mix of four ground spices - ground white pepper, nutmeg, cloves and ginger - sometimes with the addition of juniper berries.** Mace and mixed spice may be added. If you don't have these spices, then you could use allspice as a substitute, or try another mixture of spices such as the Middle Eastern spice blend known as Baharat, which also goes well with duck.



INGREDIENTS

- 12 legs - I have a mixture of swan, goose and duck, but could be all from one variety of bird
- Splash of cooking oil
- A few large sprigs of fresh thyme
- 5 fresh bay leaves, or 2 to 3 dried
- 1 whole garlic cut in half horizontally, or 8 cloves
- 300ml white wine
- 200ml water or chicken stock
- 1 tsp black or green peppercorns, lightly crushed
- 2 shallots or 1 small brown onion, peeled and cut into quarters
- 2 Tbsp French quatre épices

FOR CAPPING

- 2 Tbsp coriander seeds
- 80 gm clarified butter



Method

Heat oven to 140°C.

Trim the feet off the legs.

Heat the oil over a medium heat. Season the legs well, and brown on both sides in the pan.

Transfer to a tight-fitting roasting dish. Sprinkle over the rest of the ingredients, add the wine, combine and mix well.

Cover the roasting tray tightly with foil or a tight-fitting lid.

Place into the preset oven for approximately 2 ½ hours, or until the meat is tender and falls off the bone easily. Alternatively, use a pressure cooker.

Remove the bones and strain any liquid into a separate bowl – retain for later.

When cool enough remove any skin and discard. Squeeze out the garlic from the skins, shred the meat and place into a mixing bowl, season with salt and pepper.

Keep the onion and garlic in with the meat as you mix it, so as to break it all down and disperse it evenly.

Add some of the reserved cooking

liquid a little at a time to the duck mix - just enough to bind it together. Taste and season.

Pack the mixture into ramekins, pushing down with the back of a spoon so that the top is smooth.

In a small pot melt the butter and add the coriander seeds. Bring the butter to a light boil, and skim off any scum that may rise to the surface.

While the butter is liquid, spoon the butter and coriander seeds onto the top of the duck mix in the ramekin. Add a bay leaf for decoration if you choose

Allow to set in the fridge overnight. At least 30 minutes before you wish to serve, remove the ramekins from the fridge and allow them to come to room temperature.

This will make it easier to spread the mixture onto your crackers or bread.

Serve with mini gherkins or cornichons, and relish or chutney, on toasted sourdough bread, oat cakes, lavosh or your favourite cracker paired with a fine red wine or artisan craft beer of choice



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| Diamond Group | 101 |
| DPT Machinists..... | 17 |
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| Firearms Safety Authority..... | 58 |
| Fox&Franz Heliservices..... | 96 |
| GAC..... | 4 |
| Garmin..... | 66 |
| Gunworks | 36 |
| Helisika | 103 |
| Hunting and Fishing..... | 39 |
| Huntsman ThermallInside Front Cover | |
| Ironman 4x4 | 38 |
| Kilwell | 91 |
| Kiwi Ultralight..... | 5 |
| Lacklands..... | 51 |
| Modular buildings..... | 63 |
| Mountain Adventure..... | 37,91 |
| Mountain High Clothing..... | 63 |
| Ngamatea..... | 96 |
| Nioa New Zealand..... | 47 |
| NZ Ammo | Back Cover |
| NZ Asia | 12,13 |
| NZDA | 101 |
| Outdoor Sports - Ridgeline..... | 84 |
| Outdoor Sports | 72 |
| Owl Optics..... | 78,79 |
| PointsSouth | 65 |
| RAB | 29 |
| Spika | 67 |
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| Stoney Creek | 33 |
| Southern Approach..... | 55 |
| Southern Lakes Helicopters..... | 97 |
| Swarovski | Inside Back Cover |
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